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A GUIDE TO ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA

Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan

SECOND EDITION

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A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama

Second Edition

Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan

WILEY Blackwell

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Dedicated to the memory of
Kathryn (Kate) Grace Boshier
(1974–2013)

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Preface to the First Edition



In this Guide we have attempted to provide an introduction to all three of the genres that comprised ancient Greek drama. Many critical studies focus solely on tragedy or on comedy with only a nodding glance at the other, while satyr-drama often gets lost in the glare of the more familiar genres. We begin with a consideration of the aspects and conventions of ancient Greek drama, so like and at the same time different from our own experience of the theater, and then discuss the connections that it possessed with the festivals of Dionysos and the *polis* of Athens. Was attending or performing in the theater in the fifth and fourth centuries a “religious” experience for those involved? To what extent was ancient drama a political expression of the democracy of the Athenian *polis* in the classical era?

We consider first tragedy, the eldest of the three dramatic sisters, both the nature of the genre (“serious drama”) and the playwrights that have survived, most notably the canonical triad (Aeschylus, Sophokles, Euripides), but also some of the lesser lights who entertained the spectators and won their share of victories. We have given satyr-drama its own discussion, briefer to be sure than the others, but the student should be aware that it was a different sort of dramatic experience, yet still part of the expected offerings at the City Dionysia. As Old Comedy is inextricably bound up with Aristophanes, much of the discussion of that poet will be found in the section on Old Comedy proper as well as the separate section devoted to Aristophanes. A short chapter addresses how one should watch or read (and teach) Greek drama and introduces the student to the various schools of interpretation. Finally we have provided a series of one-page synopses of each of the forty-six reasonably complete plays that have come down to us, which contain in brief compass the essential details and issues surrounding each play.

We would thank our students and colleagues at Trent University, who over the years have been guinea-pigs for our thoughts on ancient Greek drama. Martin Boyne, in particular, gave us much useful advice as the project began to take shape. Kevin Whetter at Acadia University read much of the manuscript and provided an invaluable

commentary. Colleagues at Exeter University and the University of Canterbury in New Zealand have also been sources of ongoing advice and support. Kate Bosher (Michigan) very kindly gave us the benefit of her research into Epicharmos. Karin Sowada at the Nicholson Museum in Sydney has gone out of her way to assist in providing illustrations for the book. We have enjoyed very much working with the staff at Blackwell. Al Bertrand, Angela Cohen, Annette Abel, and Simon Alexander have become familiar correspondents, responding unfailingly to our frequent queries.

Drama is doing, and theater watching. We both owe much to the Classics Drama Group at Trent University, which since 1994 has sought to bring alive for our students the visual and performative experience of ancient drama. This volume is dedicated to them, with admiration and with thanks.

Preface to the Second Edition



Commenting on the revision of Eupolis' lost comedy *Autolykos* (420 BC), an ancient scholar defines the technical term "revision" as: "when a book is rewritten from the original version, having the same plot and most of the same text, but with some things removed from the previous version, some things added, and some things altered." This might well serve as an apt description of the second edition of our guide to ancient Greek drama. Much of the presentation of basic facts about the production of ancient plays, information about the dramatists, and details of the dramas themselves, has remained as it was in the original edition, taking into account the significant studies of the past ten years. However, in the first chapter we have conflated into one subsection ("Drama, Dionysos, and the *Polis*") the discussions of the connections of Greek drama to its patron god Dionysos and to the city (*polis*) in which most of the dramas that we have were produced, Athens. In so doing we are trying not to create artificial pigeon-holes in which to insert discussions of drama as "religious" or "political," but to see the overall experience of all concerned (poets, performers, officials, spectators) as one that directly affected their lives and identities as member of ancient Greek *polis*.

Similarly in chapter 2 we have for the most part reproduced the original descriptive material, but the section on Sophokles and the *polis* has been expanded considerably. Whereas for Aeschylus and Euripides it is possible to see specific contemporary issues reflected in their dramas, Sophokles seems to be dramatizing the issues of the *polis* more subtly, showing how matters of general import are worked out on and by individual men and women. We speculate whether Sophokles should not be considered the most politically engaged of the three extant tragic poets. To chapter 4 ("Greek Comedy") we have added two new discussions: one on the comic poet, Alexis, who had somehow slipped between the two stools of Middle and New Comedy, and the other on the so-called *phlyax*-vases, some of which are now regarded as illustrating scenes from Athenian comedy, both Old and Middle. We have also expanded our discussion of later comedy, in part to take into account the excellent recent treatments by Arnott (2010), Ireland (2010), and Traill (2008).

Chapter 5 (“Approaching Greek Drama”) has been almost entirely recast. We have retained most of the approaches outlined in the previous edition, but re-organized them into groups with related themes. “Formal Criticism” includes textual criticism and commentary, the “New” criticism by which ancient dramas are read as works of literature, and the comparative approach (or “version”). Within “Interdisciplinary Approaches” we have grouped structuralist readings, drama and ritual, gender-based studies, and psychological analyses. A third category, “Visual Interpretations,” includes both the conventions of ancient stagecraft and also the depiction of scenes from tragedy, comedy, and satyr-drama, principally on vases and in the form of terracotta statuettes. A final section, “Reception Studies” comprises the “classical tradition” as applied to drama and what we now call “performance studies.”

To the appendices we have added a “Timeline,” providing in three parallel columns: military and external events having to do with the ancient Greek world, political and social events (principally at Athens), and the development of Greek drama. These cover the period from roughly 600 BC to 300 BC. The other major change in the second edition will be found in the area of “Further Reading.” The presentation of bibliography in the first edition in various sub-sections proved to be cumbersome in appearance and difficult to use. At the end of each chapter we now provide a short series of “recommended reading,” usually five or so annotated entries on each of a number of topics raised in that chapter. At the end of the volume will be found a full list of “Further Reading,” covering both works cited in the text and our suggestions for other books, articles, and collections of essays that will (we hope) be of use to both student and instructor.

We would again like to thank our students and colleagues at Trent University and the University of Otago, who have often been the first recipients of our thoughts on ancient Greek drama and have in turn offered many insightful comments. The Classics Drama Group (the Conacher Players) at Trent University, now in their twentieth year, continues to flourish and provide us with opportunities to examine how ancient plays were (and can still be) performed. Dr. Martin Boyne (Trent) gave us a great deal of advice as the project first developed and has done so again for this second edition. We are especially grateful to those who reviewed the first edition and provided a wealth of useful suggestions on how to improve the second. We would acknowledge with thanks the support from James Morwood (Oxford), Eric Dugdale (Gustavus Adolphus), Robin Bond (Canterbury), Toph and Hallie Marshall (UBC), George Kovacs (Trent), and Donald Sells (Michigan). We have enjoyed very much working (again) with the staff at Wiley-Blackwell. Haze Humbert, Rebecca du Plessis, and Ben Thatcher have become familiar correspondents, responding unflinchingly to our frequent queries. Many thanks also to Bryn Snow for doing the index to this edition.

Finally and on a very sad note, we acknowledge the contributions to both editions made by Kathryn (Kate) Bosher (Northwestern), who gave us the benefit of her expert knowledge of Epicharmos and the tradition of drama in the Greek West. Kate’s early and unexpected passing in March 2013 shocked and dismayed her many colleagues and admirers. This revised edition of our guide to ancient Greek drama is thus dedicated to her memory.

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Abbreviations and Signs

*IG i*³ Lewis, David M. & Lilian Jeffrey, eds. 1981–94. *Inscriptiones Graecae, i*³. *Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis Anno Antiores*, 2 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter.

*IG ii*² Kirchner, Johannes. 1916–35, ed. *Inscriptiones Graecae: voluminum ii et iii editio minor*, 2 vols. Berlin: Reimer.

PCG Kassel, Rudolph & Colin Austin, eds. 1983–2001. *Poetae Comici Graeci*, 8 volumes. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter.

POxy. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus*

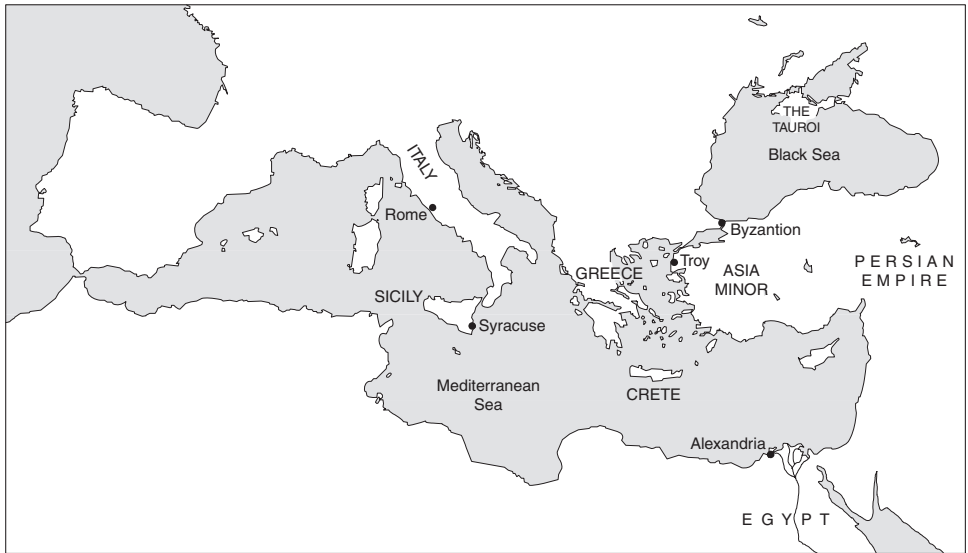
Σ Scholia, ancient commentaries that have been transmitted along with the classical texts themselves.

SEG *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

TrGF Snell, Bruno, Richard Kannicht, & Stefan Radt, eds. 1971–2004. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 4 vols. in 5. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

“F” designates the fragments of the dramatic poets. For tragedy these are cited from the volumes of *TrGF*, and for comedy from *PCG*. Several volumes in the Loeb Classical Library contain the text of most fragments with an English translation and some notes: Sommerstein 2008 vol. 3 (Aeschylus), Lloyd-Jones 1996 vol. 3 (Sophokles), Collard & Cropp 2008 (Euripides), Henderson 2007 vol. 5 (Aristophanes), Storey 2011 (the other poets of Old Comedy), and Arnott 1990 (Menander). “D” designates a play performed at the City Dionysia at Athens; “L” a play performed at the Lenaia at Athens.

All dates are BC, unless otherwise indicated. Except for some names which have become too familiar to alter (Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Aristotle, Menander ~ more properly Homeros, Aischylos, Platon, Aristoteles, Menandros), we have used Hellenized spellings (“k” to represent Greek *kappa*, endings in “-os” rather than the Latinate “-us”). Among other things it does allow the student to distinguish a Greek author (Kratinos) from a Roman one (Plautus).



Map 0.1 *Map of the Eastern Mediterranean.*



Map 0.2 *Map of Greece.*

Aspects of Ancient Greek Drama

Drama

While ancient Greek drama appears first during the sixth century BC and can be traced well down into the third, most attention is paid to the fifth century at Athens, when and where most of the nearly fifty plays that we possess were produced. In this study we shall introduce the three distinct genres of Greek drama: serious drama or tragedy (traditionally instituted in 534), **satyr-drama** (added ca. 500), and comedy (formally introduced at Athens in the 480s, but which flourished at the same time in **Syracuse**).

Drama is action. According to **Aristotle** (*Poetics* 1448a28) dramatic poets “represent people in action,” as opposed to a purely third-person narrative or the mixture of narrative and direct speech as found in **Homer**. We begin appropriately with the Greek word δράμα (*drāma*), which means “action” or “doing.” Aristotle adds that the verb *drān* was not an **Attic** word (“Attic” being the Greek dialect spoken at Athens), Athenians preferring to use the verb *prattein* and its cognates (*pragma*, *praxis*) to signify “action.” Whether this was true or not does not matter here – that *drān* is common in Athenian tragedy, but not in the prose writers, may support Aristotle’s assertion. Both **Plato** and Aristotle, the two great philosophers of the fourth century, defined drama as a *mimēsis*, “imitation” or “representation,” but each took a different view of the matter. *Mimēsis* is not an easy word to render in English, since neither “imitation” nor “representation” really hits the mark. We have left it in Greek transliteration. For Plato *mimēsis* was something disreputable, something inferior, something the ideal ruler of his ideal state would avoid. It meant putting oneself into the character of another, taking on another’s role, which in many Greek myths could be a morally inferior one, perhaps that of a slave or a woman. Plato would have agreed with Polonius in *Hamlet*, “to thine own self be true.” But Aristotle considered *mimēsis*

not only as something natural in human nature but also as something that was a pleasure and essential for human learning (*Poetics* 1448b4–8): “to engage in *mimēsis* is innate in human beings from childhood and humans differ from other living creatures in that humans are very mimetic and develop their first learning through *mimēsis* and because all humans enjoy mimetic activities.”

Drama is “doing” or “performing,” and performances function in different ways in human cultures. Religion and ritual immediately spring to mind as one context: the elaborate dances of the Shakers; the complex rituals of the Navajo peoples; the mediaeval mystery plays, which for a largely illiterate society could provide both religious instruction and ritual re-enactment as well as entertainment. Drama can also encompass “science” – the dances of the Navajo provide both a history of the creation of the world and a series of elaborate healing rituals. Dramatic performances can keep the memory of historical figures and events alive. Greek tragedy falls partly into this category, since its themes and subjects are mainly drawn from an idealized heroic age several hundred years in the past. Some of the subjects of Greek tragedy are better described as “legendary” rather than “mythical,” for legend is based on historical events, elaborated admittedly out of recognition, but real nonetheless. The Ramlila play cycles of northern India were a similar mixture of myth and history, and provided for the Hindus the same sort of cultural heritage that Greek myths did for classical Greece. An extreme example are the history-plays of Shakespeare, in particular his *Richard III*, which was inspired by the Tudor propaganda campaign aimed at discrediting the last of the Plantagenets. Finally humans enjoy both acting in and watching performances. Aristotle was right to insist that *mimēsis* is both innate to humanity and the source of natural pleasure. We watch plays because they give us the pleasure of watching a story-line unfold, an engagement with the characters, and a satisfying emotional experience.

Another crucial term is “theater.” *Thea-* in Greek means “observe,” “watch,” and while we tend to speak of an “audience” and an “auditorium” (from the Latin *audire*, “to hear”), the ancients talked of “spectators,” and the “watching-place.” The noun *theatron* (“theater”) refers both to the physical area where the plays were staged, more specifically to the area on the hillside occupied by the spectators, and also to the spectators themselves, much as “house” today can refer to the theater building and to the audience in that building. Comedians were fond of breaking the dramatic illusion and often refer openly to *theatai* (“watchers”) or *theōmenoi* (“those watching”).

Modern academic discussions make a distinction between the study of “drama” and “theater.” A university course or a textbook on “drama” tends to concentrate more on the words of the text that is performed or read. Dramatic critics approach the plays as literature and subject them to various sorts of literary theory, and often run the risk of losing the visual aspect of performance in an attempt to “understand” or elucidate the “meaning” of the text. The reader becomes as important as the watcher, if not more so. Greek drama slips easily into a course on ancient literature or world drama, in which similar principles of literary criticism can be applied to all such texts.

But the modern study of “theater” goes beyond the basic text as staged or read and has developed a complex theoretical approach that some text-based students find daunting and at times impenetrable. Fortier writes well here:

Theater is performance, though often the performance of a dramatic text, and entails not only words but space, actors, props, audience, and the complex relations . . . Theater, of necessity, involves both doing and seeing, practice and contemplation. Moreover, the word “theory” comes from the same root as “theater.” Theater and theory are both contemplative pursuits, although theater has a practical and a sensuous side which contemplation should not be allowed to overwhelm.*

The study of “theater” will concern itself with the experience of producing and watching drama, before, during, and after the actual performance of the text itself. Theatrical critics want to know about the social assumptions and experiences of organizers, authors, performers, judges, and spectators. In classical Athens plays were performed on a public occasion, supported from the state treasury, in a theater placed next to the shrine of a god and as part of a festival of that god, in broad daylight where spectators would be conscious of far more than the performance unfolding below – of the city and country around them and of their own existence as spectators.

Ours is meant to be a guide to Greek *drama*, rather than to Greek *theater*. Our principal concern will be the texts themselves and their authors and, although such an approach may be somewhat out of date, the intentions of the authors themselves. But we do not want to lose sight of the practical elements that Fortier speaks of, especially the visual spectacle that accompanied the enactment of the recited text, for a picture is worth a thousand words, and if we could witness an ancient production, we would learn incalculably more about what the author was doing and how this was received by his original “house.” Knowing the conventions of the ancient theater assists also with understanding why certain scenes are written the way they are, why characters must leave and enter when they do, why crucial events are narrated rather than depicted.

Drama and the poets

Homer (eighth century) stands not just at the beginning of Greek poetry, but of Western literature as we know it. His two heroic epics, *Iliad* (about Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan War) and *Odyssey* (the return of Odysseus [Ulysses] from that war), did much to establish the familiar versions of the myths about both gods and men. Homer is the great poet of classical Greece, and his epics, along with what we call the “epic cycle” – lost poems, certainly later than Homer, that completed the story of the Trojan War, as well as another epic cycle relating the events at Thebes – formed the backdrop to so much later Greek literature, especially for the dramatists. Much of the plots, characters, and language come from Homer – **Aeschylus** is described as serving up “slices from the banquet of Homer” – and the dramatic critic needs always to keep one eye on Homer, to see what use the poets are making of his seminal material. For example, Homer created a brilliantly whole and appealing, if somewhat unconventional, character in his Odysseus, but for the dramatists of the fifth century

* M. Fortier, *Theatre/Theory* (London, Routledge: 1997), 4–6.

Odysseus becomes a one-sided figure: the paragon of clever talk and deceit, the evil counselor, and in one instance (**Sophokles'** *Ajax*) the embodiment of a new and enlightened sort of heroism. Homer's Achilles is one of the great examples of the truly "tragic" hero, a man whose pursuit of honor causes the death of his dearest friend and ultimately his own doom, but when he appears in **Euripides'** *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, we see an ineffectual youth, full of sound and fury, and unable to rescue the damsel in distress.

Of the surviving thirty-three plays attributed to the tragedians, only two dramatize material from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (Euripides' satyr-drama *Cyclops* [*Odyssey* 9] and *Rhesos* of doubtful authenticity [*Iliad* 10]), but we do know of several lost plays that also used Homeric material. Homer may be three centuries earlier than the tragedians of the fifth century, but his influence upon them was crucial. Homer himself was looking back to an earlier age, what we call the late Bronze Age (1500–1100), a tradition which he passed on to the dramatists. Both Homer and the tragedians are depicting people and stories not of their own time, but of an earlier idealized age of heroes.

In the seventh and sixth centuries heroic epic began to yield to choral poetry (often called "lyric," from its accompaniment by the lyre). These were poems intended to be sung, usually by large choruses in a public setting. Particularly important for the study of drama are the grand poets Stesichoros (ca. 600), Bacchylides (career: 510–450), and Pindar (career: 498–440s), who took the traditional tales from myth and epic and retold them in smaller portions, consciously reworking the material that they had inherited. They used a different meter from Homer, not the epic hexameter chanted by a single bard, but elaborate "lyric" meters, sung by large choruses. No work by Stesichoros has survived intact, but we know he wrote poem on the Theban story, one of tragedy's favorite themes; an *Oresteia*, containing significant points of contact with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*; and a version of the story of Helen that Euripides will take up wholesale in his *Helen*. Poem 16 by Bacchylides tells the story of Herakles' death at the hands of his wife, much as Sophokles dramatizes the story in his *Trachinian Women*, and it is not clear whether Bacchylides' poem or Sophokles' tragedy is the earlier work. Pindar in *Pythian* 11 (474) will anticipate Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (458) by presenting Klytaimestra's various motives for killing her husband.

Why Athens?

Most, if not all, of the plays we have were originally written and performed at Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries. Thus much of our study will be centered upon Athens, although theaters and dramatic performances were not exclusive to Athens. Argos had a reasonably sized theater in the fifth century, while at Syracuse, the greatest of the Greek states in the West, there was an elaborate theater and a tradition of comedy by the early fifth century. But it was at Athens in the late sixth and early fifth centuries that the three genres of drama were formalized as public competitions. Traditionally the first official performance of tragedy is credited to **Thespis** in 534, but as the records of the dramatic performances appear to begin around 501, many prefer to date the

actual beginning of tragedy (and thus of Greek drama) to that later date. But whatever date one chooses (see the next chapter), one must understand the political and social background of Athens, both in the sixth century and in the high classical age of democracy.

In the sixth century Athens was not yet the leading city of the Greek world, politically, militarily, economically, or culturally, that she would become in the fifth century. The principal states of the sixth century in the Greek homeland were Sparta, Corinth, Sikyon, and Samos, and some ancient sources do record some sort of dramatic performances at Corinth and Sikyon earlier in the sixth century. Athens was an important city, but not in the same league as these others. By the early sixth century Athens had brought under her central control the region called “Attica” (map 1.1). This is a triangular peninsula roughly forty miles in length from the height of land that divides Attica from Boiotia (dominated by Thebes) to the south-eastern tip of Cape Sounion, and at its widest expanse about another forty miles. Athens itself lies roughly in the center, no more than thirty miles or so from any outlying point – the most famous distance is that from Athens to Marathon, just over twenty-six miles, covered by the runner announcing the victory at Marathon in 490 and thus the length of the modern marathon race. Attica itself was not particularly rich agriculturally – the only substantial plains lie around Athens itself and at Marathon – nor does it supply good grazing for cattle or sheep. But in the late sixth century Athens underwent an economic boom through the discovery and utilization of three products of the Attic soil: olives and olive oil, which rapidly became the best in the eastern Mediterranean; clay for pottery – Athenian vase-ware soon replaced Corinthian as the finest of the day; and silver from the mines at Laureion – the Athenian “owls” became a standard coinage of the eastern Mediterranean.

Coupled with this economic advance were the political developments of the late sixth century. The Greek cities of the seventh and sixth centuries experienced an uneasy mix of hereditary monarchy, factional aristocracy, popular unrest (at Athens especially over debts and the loss of personal freedom), and “tyranny.” To us “tyranny” is a pejorative term, like “dictatorship,” but in Archaic Greece it meant “one-man-rule,” usually where that one man had made himself ruler, sometimes rescuing a state from an internal *stasis* (“civil strife”). Various lists of the seven wise men of ancient Greece include as many as four **tyrants**. At Athens the tyrant Peisistratos seized power permanently in the mid 540s following a period of internal instability and ruled to his death in 528/7. He was succeeded by his son Hippias, who was expelled from Athens in 510 by an alliance of exiled aristocrats, the Delphic oracle, and the Spartan kings.

In the fifth century *tyrannos* (“tyrant”) was a pejorative term, used often as an accusation against a political opponent, and the first use of ostracism at Athens (a state-wide vote to expel a political leader for ten years) in 487 was to exile “friends of the tyrants.” But in the fourth century the age of the tyrants (546–510) was remembered as an “age of Kronos,” a golden age before the defeat of Athens during the democracy. The tyrants set Athens on the road to her future greatness in the fifth century under the democracy. They provided political and economic stability after a period of bitter economic class-conflict in the early sixth century, attracted artists and



Map 1.1 Map of Attica. *Italicized sites are known to have had a theater.*

poets to their court at Athens, inaugurated a building program that would be surpassed only by the grandeur of the Acropolis in the next century, established or enhanced the festival of the Panthenaia, the four-yearly celebration of Athene and of Athens, and instituted contests for the recitation of the Homeric poems, establishing incidentally the first “official” text of Homer. The tyrants quelled discontent and divisions within the state and instilled a common sense of identity that paved the way for Athens’ greatness in the next century. Peisistratos created also a single festival of Dionysos at Athens, the **City Dionysia** in late March. This did not replace, but augmented the Rural Dionysia celebrated locally throughout Attica in late autumn. As

late March marked the opening of the sailing season and the arrival in Athens of overseas visitors, the City Dionysia was thus a festival for all Athenians and their guests. It was at this festival that tragedy was first performed.

Economic success and cultural advancement were followed by political and military developments, which propelled Athens into the forefront of Greek city-states by the middle of the fifth century. First tyranny was replaced by democracy. Political maneuvering following the expulsion of Hippias in 510 resulted in the establishment of a democratic form of government in 507, eventually possessing a popular assembly (*ekklesiā*), elected officials, a jury-system, and two important watch-words: *isonomia* ("equality under the law") and *parrhēsia* ("freedom of speech"). Next came the successful defense against a threat from the powerful Persian empire to the east, three invasions of Greece (492, 490, 481–479), thwarted by crucial victories at Marathon (490) and Salamis (480), in which Athens played a key role. After the wars a league established under Athens' leadership to defend against future Persian attacks had by the mid 450s become an Athenian *archē* ("empire"). A massive building program replaced the buildings destroyed by the Persians, of which the best-known is the Parthenon on the Acropolis. An atmosphere of success and self-confidence dominated Athens in the fifth century, much in the same way that success in World War II, coupled with their sense of manifest destiny, catapulted the United States into a position of world leadership.

The time-frame

On whatever date we prefer for its formal institution, tragedy was not "invented" overnight and we may imagine some sort of choral performances in the sixth century developing into what would be called "tragedy." Thus, even though the first extant play (Aeschylus' *Persians*) belongs in 472, we need to begin our study of drama in the sixth century. Like any form of art drama has its different periods, each with its own style and leading poets. The one we know best corresponds with Athens' ascendancy in the Greek world (479–404), from which we have the canonical "Three" of tragedy (Aeschylus, Sophokles, Euripides), forty-six complete or reasonably complete plays, as well as a wealth of fragments and *testimonia* about lost plays and authors. New tragedies continued to be written and performed in the fourth century and well into the third, but along with the new arose a fascination with the old, and competitions were widened to include "old" or revived plays. In the third century tragic activity shifted to the scholar-poets of **Alexandria**, but here it is uncertain whether these tragedies were meant to be read rather than performed, and if performed, for how wide an audience.

The evidence suggests that satyr-drama is a later addition to the dramatic festivals; most scholars accept a date of introduction ca. 501. In the fifth century one satyr-drama would follow the performance of the three tragedies by each competing playwright, but by 340 satyr-drama was divorced from the tragic competitions and only one performed at the opening of the festival. Thus at some point during the fourth century satyr-drama becomes its own separate genre.

Formal competitions for comedy began later than tragedy and satyr-drama, the canonical date being the Dionysia of 486. The ancient critics divided comedy at Athens into three distinct chronological phases: Old Comedy, roughly synonymous with the classical fifth century (486 to ca. 385); Middle Comedy (ca. 385–325, or “between **Aristophanes** and **Menander**”); New Comedy (325 onward). We have complete plays surviving from the first and third of these periods. The ancients knew also that comedy flourished at Syracuse in the early fifth century and that there was something from the same period called “Megarian comedy.”

The evidence

We face two distinct problems in approaching Greek drama: the distance in time and culture from our own, and the sheer loss of evidence. We are dealing with texts that are nearly 2500 years removed in time, written in another language and produced for an audience with cultural assumptions very different from our own. “The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there,” wrote L.P. Hartley, and we should not react to reading (or watching) an ancient Greek drama in the same way that we approach a play by Shakespeare or Shaw or Pinter.

The actual evidence is of four sorts: the texts themselves, literary *testimonia*, physical remains of theaters, and visual representations of theatrical scenes. So far the manuscript tradition and discoveries on papyrus (see fig. 4.4) have yielded as complete texts thirty-one tragedies, one satyr-drama, one quasi-satyr-drama, and thirteen comedies. But these belong to only five (perhaps six or seven) distinct playwrights, out of the dozens that we know were active on the Greek stage. We often assume that Aeschylus, Sophokles, and Euripides (for tragedy), and Aristophanes and Menander (for comedy) were the best at their business, but were they representative of all that the Athenians watched during those two centuries? Within these individual authors we have only six or seven plays out of eighty or so by Aeschylus, seven out of 120 by Sophokles, eighteen out of ninety by Euripides, eleven comedies out of forty by Aristophanes, and only two comedies by Menander from over 100. On what grounds were these selections made, by whom, for whom, and when? Are these selected plays representative of their author’s larger opus? For Euripides we have both a selected collection of ten plays and an alphabetical sequence of nine plays that may be more representative of his work as a whole.

We do not possess anything remotely close to the scripts of the original productions or to the official texts that were established by **Lykourgos** ca. 330 and then passed to the Library in Alexandria. We have some remains preserved on papyrus from the Roman period, most notably Menander’s *The Grouch*, virtually complete on a codex from the third century AD, but the earliest manuscripts of Greek drama belong about AD 1000, and these are the products of centuries of copying and recopying. Dionysos in *Frogs* (405) talks of “sitting on my ship reading [Euripides’] *Andromeda*” and for the fifth century we know of book-stalls in the marketplace; these would not have been elaborate “books” in our sense of the word, but very basic texts allowing the reader to recreate his experience in the theater. The manuscripts and papyri present texts in

an abbreviated form, with no division between words, changes of speaker often indicated (if at all) by an underlining or a dicolon, no stage directions – almost all the directions in a modern translation are the creation of the translator – and very frequent errors, omissions, and additions to the text. For plays such as Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* and Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* we depend on one manuscript only for a complete text of the play.

In addition to the actual texts, we have considerable literary *testimonia* about the dramatic tradition generally and about individual plays and personalities. Most important is Aristotle's *Poetics*, a sketchily written treatise, principally on tragedy and epic, dating from ca. 330, but with some general introductory comments on the early history of drama. Aristotle was himself not an Athenian by birth, although resident there for many years, and wrote 100 years after the high period of Attic tragedy. The great question in dealing with *Poetics* is whether Aristotle knows what he is talking about, or whether he is extrapolating backwards in much the same manner as a modern critic. He would have seen plays performed in the theater, both new dramas of the fourth century and revivals of the old masters, and he did have access to much documentary material that we lack. An early work was his *Production Lists*, the records of the productions and victories from the inception of the contests ca. 501. He would have had access to writers on drama and dramatists; the anecdotes of Ion of Chios, himself a dramatist and contemporary of Sophokles; Sophokles' own work *On the Chorus*; and perhaps the lost work by Glaukos of Rhegion (ca. 400), *On the Old Poets and Musicians*. Thus his raw material would have been far greater than ours. But would this pure data have shed any light on the early history of the genre? Was he, at times, just making an educated guess? When Aristotle makes a pronouncement, we need to pay attention, but also to wonder how secure is the evidence on which he bases that conclusion.

His *Poetics* is partly an analytical breakdown of the genre of tragedy into its component parts and partly a guide for reader and playwright, and contains much that is both hard to follow and controversial: the "end" of tragedy is a *katharsis* of pity and fear (chapter 6); one can have a tragedy without character, but not without plot; the best tragic characters are those who fall into misfortune through some *hamartia* (chapter 13). This last term is often mistranslated as "tragic flaw." But this would give Greek tragedy an emphasis on character, whereas Aristotle at this point (chapters 7–14) is discussing tragic plots. It is better rendered as "a mistake made in ignorance," and as such restores Aristotle's emphasis on plot.

Other useful sources include the Attic orators of the fourth century, who often quote from the tragic poets to reinforce their rhetorical points. For example, Lykourgos, the fourth-century orator responsible for the rebuilding of the theater at Athens ca. 330, gives us fifty-five lines from Euripides' lost *Erechtheus*, in which a mother consents to the sacrifice of her daughter to save Athens. The fourth book of the *Onomasticon* ("Thesaurus") by Pollux (second century AD) contains much that is useful about the ancient theater, especially a list of technical terms and a description of the masks worn by certain comic type-characters. The Roman architectural writer, Vitruvius (first century AD), has much to say about theatrical buildings especially of the Hellenistic period. The "book fragments" of the lost plays are usually quotations from

a wide variety of ancient and mediaeval writers. Two in particular are useful for the student of drama: the polymath Athenaios (second century AD), whose *Experts at Dining* contains a treasury of citations, and Stobaios (fourth/fifth century AD), a collector of familiar quotations. The first-century-AD scholar, Dion of Prusa, sheds light on the three tragedies on the subject of Philoktetes and the bow of Herakles, by summarizing the plots and styles of all three – useful, since we possess only the version by Sophokles (409).

Inscriptions provide another source of written evidence. The ancients would display publicly their decrees, rolls of officials, casualty lists, and records of competitions. One inscription contains a partial list of the victors at the Dionysia in **dithyramb**, comedy, and tragedy (*IG ii² 2318*), another presents the tragic and comic victors at both festivals in order of their first victory (*IG ii² 2325*), a Roman inscription lists the various victories of Kallias, a comedian of the 430s, in order of finish (first through fifth). Two inscriptions (*IG ii² 2320, 2323*) give invaluable details about the contests at the Dionysia for 341, 340, and 311, especially that by 340 satyr-drama was performed separately at the start of the festival. A decree from Aixone (312 – *SEG 36.186*) records the honors given by that deme to two *chorēgoi* who have performed their duties with distinction.

As physical evidence the remains of hundreds of Greek and Roman theaters are known, ranging from the major sites of Athens, Delphi, Epidauros, Dodona, Syracuse, and Ephesos to small theaters tucked away in the backwoods. The actual physical details of a Greek theater will be discussed below, but some general comments are appropriate here. Most of the theaters are not in their fifth-century condition, since major rebuilding took place in the fourth century, in the Hellenistic period (300–30 BC), and especially under Roman occupation. When the tourist or the student visits Athens today, the theater that he or she sees (fig. 1.1) is not the structure that Aeschylus or Aristophanes knew. We see curved stone seats, reserved seating in the front row, a paved *orchēstra* floor, and an elaborate raised structure in the middle of the *orchēstra*. We have perhaps been misled by the classical perfection of the famous theater at Epidauros (fig. 1.2) into thinking that this is typical of all ancient theaters. The Athenian theater of the fifth century had straight benches on the hillside, an *orchēstra* floor of packed earth (an *orchēstra* that may not have been a perfect circle), and a wooden building at the back of the *orchēstra*. At Athens and Syracuse later theaters replaced the old on the same site, while at Argos the impressive and large fourth-century theater was built on a new site, the fifth-century theater being more compact and smaller in size, with straight front-facing rows of seating rather than curved (fig. 1.3).

The theaters that we do have, from whatever period of Greek antiquity, tell us much about the physical experience of attending the theater. Audiences were large and sat as a community in the open air – this was not theater of the private enclosed space. Distances were great – to someone in the last row at Epidauros a performer in the *orchēstra* would appear only a few inches high. Thus theater of the individual expression was out – impossible in fact since the performers wore masks. But acoustics were superb and directed spectators' attention to what was being said or sung. Special effects were limited – the word and the gesture carried the force of the drama. The



Figure 1.1 *Theater of Dionysos, Athens. Photo by Ian Vining.*



Figure 1.2 *Theater at Epidauros. Photo by Steve Smith.*



Figure 1.3 *Seating in the fifth-century theater at Argos. Photo by I.C. Storey.*

prominence and centrality of the *orchēstra* reflect the importance of the chorus – Greek audiences were used to seeing more rather than fewer performers before them.

Most of the visual representations are found on Greek vases. This particular form of Greek art begins to reach its classical perfection with the black figure pottery of the late sixth century (figures appear in black against a red background), and continues with the exquisite red figure (the reverse) of the fifth and fourth centuries. About 520 we start to see representations of public performances, usually marked by the presence of an *aulos*-player, and then scenes inspired by tragedy, satyr-drama, and comedy.

The vases do not show an actual performance of a tragedy, although one Athenian vase (460–450 – see cover illustration) shows a chorister dressed as a **maenad** and an actor holding his mask, while another from the 430s shows a pair of performers preparing to dress as maenads (see fig. 1.10). But from 450 onward vases do display scenes clearly influenced by tragedy: the opening-scene of *Libation-Bearers* (see fig. 5.1), a series of vases depicting Sophokles' early tragedy *Andromeda*, another group reflecting Euripides' innovative *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, the "Cleveland Medea" (see fig. 5.2), a striking fourth-century tableau illustrating the opening scenes of *Eumenides* (see fig. 5.4), and equally impressive scenes from Sophokles' *Oedipus at Kolonos* and Euripides' *Alkestis* (see fig. 5.3). One or two of these show a pillar structure, which may be an attempt to render the central door of the *skēnē*, but these vases are not depicting

an actual tragic performance. The characters do not wear masks, males are often shown heroically nude (or nearly so) instead of wearing the distinctive costume of tragedy, and there is no hint of the *aulos*-player, a sure sign of a representation of a performance. For satyr-drama the superb Pronomos Vase (see fig. 3.1), from the very end of the fifth century, shows the performers of a satyr-drama by Demetrios in various degrees of their on-stage dress, accompanied by the *aulos*-player, Pronomos.

For comedy early vases show padded dancers in a celebration (*kōmos*) and men performing in animal-choruses. Some identify these as the predecessors to comedy. From the fifth century there is not much direct evidence. The Perseus Vase (ca. 420) showing a comic performer on a raised platform before two spectators may or may not reflect a performance in the theater; it might equally well reflect a private performance at a symposium. But there is a wealth of vases from the fourth century, principally from the south of Italy, which show grotesquely masked and padded comic performers with limp and dangling *phalloi* in humorous situations. For a long time these were thought to be representations of a local Italian farce called *phlyakes*, but it is now accepted that these reflect Athenian Old and Middle Comedy which, contrary to accepted belief, was performed in the Greek cities of southern Italy. Some vases show a raised stage with steps and the double door of drama and thus are plainly illustrating an actual stage performance. The most famous of these are the Würzburg Telephos (see fig. 4.3), a vase from about 370 which depicts a scene from Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411); a vase by Assteas (ca. 350) showing a scene from Eupolis' lost comedy, *Demes* (417); and the *Chorēgoi* Vase (see fig. 4.2), which seems to show figures from both comedy and tragedy.

Sculptural representations of drama are less common. A relief from the late fifth century shows three actors holding masks before Dionysos and his consort – some have conjectured that this is the cast of Euripides' prize-winning *Bacchae*. A stele from Aixone (313/2) records honors accorded to two successful *chorēgoi* from that deme and displays five comic masks and two crowns as well as a scene of Dionysos with a young satyr. Many terracotta masks from various periods shed valuable light on what comic masks looked like. Scenes from the comedy of Menander (career: 325–290) were often part of the decoration of ancient houses, most notably a fresco in the “House of Menander” in Pompeii (destroyed in AD 79 by the eruption of Vesuvius) and a third-century-AD house in Mytilene on Lesbos, where eleven floor mosaics remain, with a title and named characters that allow us to identify the exact scene depicted.

The Dramatic Festivals

In the city of Athens drama was produced principally at two festivals honoring the god Dionysos, the **Lenaia** and the City Dionysia. We discuss below the extent to which drama (in particular, tragedy) was a form of “religious” expression and what, if anything, Greek drama had to do with Dionysos. We are concerned here with the details and mechanics of the festivals and the place of drama within them. While the festivals honored the god Dionysos and the plays were performed in a theater adjoining his sacred precinct, they were also state occasions run by the public officials

of Athens, part of the communal life of the city (*polis*). We shall need to consider also the extent to which drama at Athens was “political,” in the various senses of the word.

Dionysos was honored at Athens with a number of celebrations: the Rural Dionysia (held in the local communities of Attica in late autumn); the Lenaia in late January; the Anthesteria (“Flower Time”) in mid-February; and the City Dionysia in late March or early April. While we know that dramatic competitions certainly occurred at some of the Rural Dionysia throughout Attica, the main dramatic festivals were the Lenaia and the City Dionysia. The oldest and principal venue was the City Dionysia, which occupied five days in the Athenian month of Elaphebolion (“Deer Hunt”), corresponding to late March or early April. The tyrant, Peisistratos (ruled mid 540s to 527) is said to have created one splendid Dionysia to be held within the city of Athens. A myth was developed to document the progress of the god Dionysos from Eleutherai, a community on the northern border of Attica, to Athens itself. Since Eleutherai had recently become part of Attica, there would have been also a political element at work here.

Preliminaries to the actual festival included a *proagōn* (“precontest”) on 8 Elaphebolion, at which the poets would appear with their actors and chorus and give hints about their forthcoming compositions, and on 9 Elaphebolion Dionysos’ statue was taken from the precinct of his temple to the Academy on the north-west outskirts of Athens, where the road from Eleutherai approached the city, in preparation for the formal *pompē* (“parade”) the next day. The actual details and order of events at the festival are not established with certainty, but the following scheme is a probable one for the 430s:

The City Dionysia, ca. 430

Preliminaries:	8 Elaphebolion	<i>proagōn</i> (“precontest”)
	9 Elaphebolion	“introduction” of Dionysos
Events:	10 Elaphebolion	<i>pompē</i> (parade); dithyrambic contests (men and boys)
	11 Elaphebolion	comic contest (five poets, one play each)
	12 Elaphebolion	tragedian A (three tragedies, one satyr-drama)
	13 Elaphebolion	tragedian B (three tragedies, one satyr-drama)
	14 Elaphebolion	tragedian C (three tragedies, one satyr-drama); awarding of the prizes, parade of the victors

After the festival, a special session of the *ekklēsia* was convened within the theater, rather than in its usual meeting-place on the Pnyx, to consider the conduct of the festival for that year.

There has been considerable debate whether the number of comedies was cut from five to three during the **Peloponnesian War** (431–404) and whether these three remaining comedies were moved, one each to follow the satyr-drama on each of three days devoted to tragedy, thus shaving the festival to four days. In the hypotheses to Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (423-D), *Peace* (421-D), and *Birds* (414-D), only three plays and poets are given, whereas a Roman inscription records fourth- and fifth-place finishes for Kallias in the 430s and five plays are also attested for the Dionysia in the fourth century. Aristophanes’ *Wealth* was part of a production of five comedies in 388, but

it is not known at what festival it was performed. A passage from *Birds* (414-D) is crucial here: “There is nothing better or more pleasant than to grow wings. If one of you spectators had wings, when he got hungry and bored with the tragic choruses, he could fly off, go home, and have a good meal, and when he was full, fly back to us” (785–9). If the “us” means “comic performers,” which is the natural flow of the passage, then in 414 comedy was performed on the same day as tragedy. Those who deny that comedy was reduced from five productions to three must argue that “us” means the theater generally, that the now refreshed spectator would be returning for a later tragedy. But when a comic chorus uses “us,” it usually refers to its identity as a comic chorus and not as part of the general theatrical community. It is usually assumed that comedy was reduced for economic reasons during the War, but comedy was a controversial genre in the 430s and 420s. We know of one decree forbidding personal humor in comedy from 439 to 436, and of at least two personal attacks by Kleon on Aristophanes in 426 and 423. The reduction may have had as much to do with the now dangerously topical nature of comedy as with economic savings. Comedy also employed more chorus-members and to eliminate two plays was to free up fifty more Athenians for military service.

The dramatic competitions continued to change over the next century, and certain inscriptions yield valuable information about the dramatic presentations around 340, at which time the festival was being re-organized. By 340 the satyr-drama had separated from the tragic presentations and a single such play opened the festival (Timokles’ *Lykourgos* in 340 and someone’s *Daughters of Phorkos* in 339). In 386 an “old tragedy” was introduced into the festival – Euripides’ *Iphigeneia* in 341, his *Orestes* in 340, and another of his plays in 339. In 341 three tragic poets each presented three tragedies, employing three actors, each of whom performed in one play by each playwright, but in 340 the tragedians have only two plays and two actors each. Sharing the lead actors among all the competing poets would presumably have allowed each to demonstrate their abilities irrespective of the text that they had to interpret and the abilities of the dramatist whose plays they were performing. In 339 we are told that “for the first time the comic poets put on an ‘old’ comedy.” Another inscription shows that dithyrambs for men and boys were still part of the Dionysia in 332–328 and lists the victors in the order: dithyramb, comedy, tragedy.

The City Dionysia in 340 (IG ii² 2320.16–29)

Satyr-drama: *Lykourgos* by Timokles.

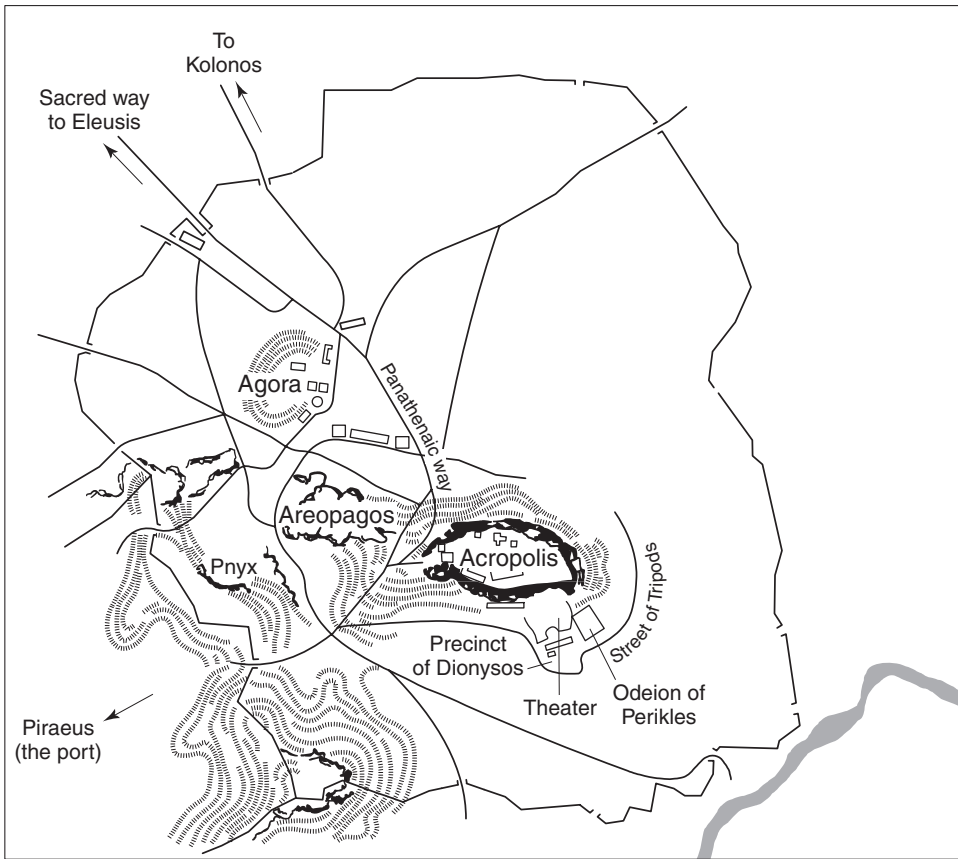
“Old” tragedy: Euripides’ *Orestes*, presented by Neoptolemos.

First prize: Astydamos, with *Parthenopaïos* (lead actor: Neoptolemos) and *Lykaon* (lead actor: Thettalos).

Second prize: Timokles, with *Phrixos* (lead actor: Thettalos) and *Oedipus* (lead actor: Neoptolemos).

Third prize: Euaretos, with *Alkmaion* (lead actor: Thettalos) and . . . *Je* (lead actor: Neoptolemos).

Actor’s prize: Thettalos.



Map 1.2 Map of Athens.

The Lenaia took place in the Athenian month of Gamelion (“Marriage”), which corresponds to our late January. It was an ancient festival of the Ionian Greeks, to which ethnic group the Athenians belonged. We know little about the purpose and rituals of the Lenaia – mystical elements have been suggested, or a celebration of the birth of Dionysos, or the ritual of *sparagmos* (eating the raw flesh of the prey). A parade is attested with “jokes from the wagons,” that is, insults directed at those watching, as well as a general Dionysiac sense of abandon. The evidence suggests that the celebrations of the Lenaia were originally performed in the *agora*, rather than at the precinct of Dionysos at the south-east corner of the Acropolis (“Dionysos-in-the-Marshes”), where the theater itself would later be located. Whereas the City Dionysia was under the control of the **archon** eponymous, once the leading political official at Athens, the Lenaia was handled by the archon *basileus*, who had taken over the traditional religious role of the early kings.

Competitions for tragedy and comedy were introduced to the Lenaia around 440. It is sometimes assumed that this was a less prestigious festival, at which newcomers

would try their hand before producing at the more important Dionysia. Eratosthenes, a scholar of the third century BC, seems to suggest that a relegation system was in operation:

The thea[trical productions] were [of two types]: the Lenae[an appear not to have been equally reputable, perhaps also because of the fact that in s[pring the al]lies had already c[ome from abroa]d to see [the performances and do b]usiness. With “t[o the city” the Dionysia is indicated. Eratosthenes also says of Plato (the comic poet) that as long as he had his plays produced by others, he did well; but when he first produced a play on his own, *Security* (*Rhabdouchoi*), and placed fourth, he was pushed back to the Lenaea. [This is part of a second-century commentary on an Old Comedy. The translation given here is that of Csapo and Slater (1995) nr. 71, p. 135. The Plato mentioned here is not the philosopher, but a comic poet, active 424–380, often spelled “Platon” to prevent confusion.]

But Eratosthenes’ conclusion may be based on *didaskalia* (“production records”), which showed Platon finishing fourth at the Dionysia in one year and then producing only at the Lenaia in the next year.

In *Acharnians* (425) the main character declares that “this is the contest at the Lenaia, and we are by ourselves,” i.e. only Athenians and **metics** (*metoikoi* – “resident foreigners”) were present, while the Dionysia in late March marked the re-opening of travel by sea, the arrival of ambassadors, and the bringing of the tribute by the allies to Athens and would thus have had a more international audience. At the Lenaia metics could perform as choristers and act as *chorēgoi*, a practice that was not allowed at the Dionysia. There is no evidence in the classical period for either dithyramb or satyr-drama at the Lenaia; the formal entertainment seems to have been tragedy and comedy only. Nor do we have firm evidence for the number of plays produced. An inscription of 418 (*IG* ii² 2319 col. ii) shows that two tragedians produced two plays each, while another of 363 gives the number of tragic poets as three. For comedy the hypotheses to *Acharnians* (425-L), *Knights* (424-L), *Wasps* (422-L), and *Frogs* (405-L) record only three plays, while two Roman inscriptions show that five comedies were performed at the Lenaia before and after the Peloponnesian War (431–404).

The Rural Dionysia was celebrated in the various local communities (called “demes,” 139 in the classical period) of Attica, and there is considerable evidence for the performance of drama in as many as twenty of the demes (map 1.1), principally the larger ones such as Acharnai, Eleusis, and Ikarion. A small deme theater is extant at Thorikos (see map 1.4) in the south-east of Attica, and the port city of Peiraieus is known to have had an important theater, where Euripides produced and Sokrates attended. Plato (*Republic* 475d) tells of theater-mad spectators, who would attend one Rural Dionysia after another. These productions were probably revivals of earlier plays produced at the Athenian festivals, to allow those unable to travel to the city to see the plays that they had missed. Like the festivals in the city, these were competitions. Evidence suggests that Aixone, Rhamnous, and Anagyros seem to have staged only comedy, while Paiania was restricted to tragedy. All three competitions (dithyramb, tragedy, comedy) are known at Eleusis. A particularly interesting inscription at Eleusis from the last decade of the fifth century attests to a double *chorēgia* and victories by Sophokles and Aristophanes: “*IG* ii² 3090: Gnathis son of Timokedes,

Anaxandrides son of Timagoros won the victory as *chorēgoi* for comedy. Aristophanes was *didaskalos*. <They also won> another victory in tragedy, for which Sophokles was *didaskalos*." *Didaskalos* ("teacher") means the person who brought on the play, usually, but not always, the author. "Director" comes closer than "producer," but is misleading since modern plays and movies are rarely directed by their author.

Aspiring playwrights would apply to the official in charge of the festival months in advance for a chorus and the technical term for success was "to be granted a chorus." The officials, the archon *basileus* for the Lenaia and the archon *eponymous* for the Dionysia, took up their positions at the start of the institutional Athenian year in early July and would have begun immediately on their preparations for the festivals which were only months away (in the case of the Lenaia just seven). We are not certain how much of a play (or plays) an aspiring comic or tragic poet would submit to the archon, or the extent to which past reputation, youth, or personal connections played a role in the selection. A successful tragic poet seems to be staging a production every two years; thus a playwright might be well advanced on a group of plays by the time of the selection of poets. Comedy speaks harshly of one archon who turned down Sophokles in favor of the inferior Gnesippos: "[the archon] who wouldn't give Sophokles a chorus, but did grant one to the son of Kleomachos [Gnesippos], whom I wouldn't consider worthy to put on plays for me, not even at the Adonia" (Kratinos F 17). The speaker here could be a *chorēgos*, another archon, or possibly Tragedy herself.

After the poets were selected, the archons would appoint *chorēgoi* for the twenty dithyrambic choruses, three *chorēgoi* for tragedy (one for each playwright), and five for comedy (again one for each competitor). The word *chorēgos* (plural: *chorēgoi*) means "chorus bringer," and these were wealthy Athenians whose job it would be to recruit choristers, hire a trainer, provide a training-space, maintain these choristers, provide the costumes and masks and any special effects and properties that would be needed. Thus the *chorēgos* was both providing the chorus and providing for its members. A *chorēgia* was a state-imposed duty (technical term: *leitourgia*, "liturgy") on the very richest of Athenians, and was considered a patriotic duty as important as outfitting a warship in the navy. There is an interesting tension here between the demands of the state to provide this popular entertainment and the self-glorification of the *chorēgoi* as the splendid individuals who provided that entertainment. Wilson puts it well (2000: 54), "For the performance of a *leitourgia* was an act of *giving* to the demos, with all the implications of reciprocal obligation that the gift brings." In the law-courts speakers would point to their services as a *chorēgoi* as evidence of their good character and democratic sentiments. One such example occurs at Antiphon I.β.12 (ca. 420):

When you look at the deeds of my life, you will realize that I have never plotted against anyone nor sought what was not mine. On the contrary, I have paid large property-taxes, often served as a trierarch, sponsored a splendid chorus, loaned money to many people, put up substantial guarantees on others' behalf. I acquired my wealth, not through the law-court, but through my own hard work, being a god-fearing and law-abiding person. Being of such a nature, then do not convict me of anything unholy or shameful.

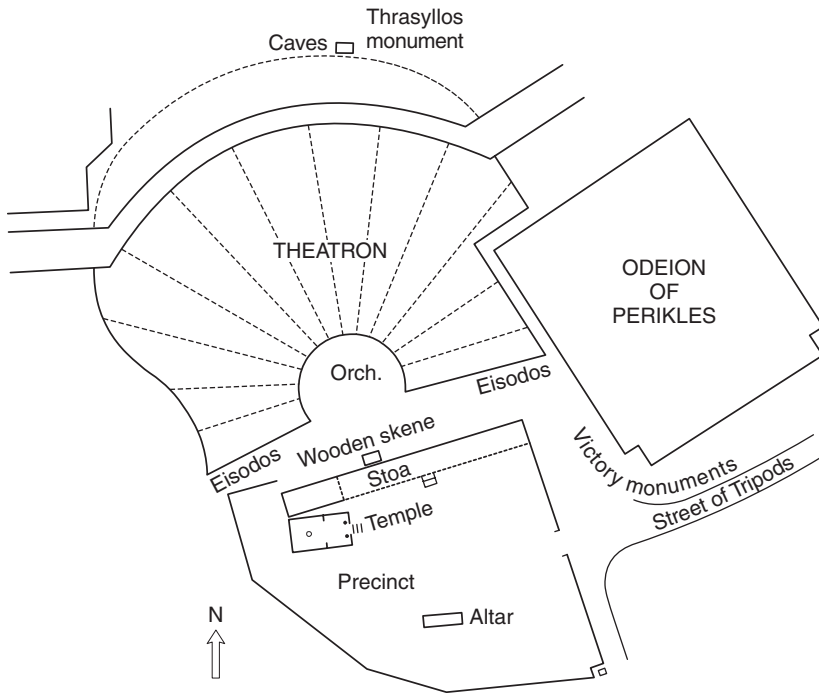
Lysias 21 shows us a young man stating with pride that in his frequent and enthusiastic service as a *chorēgos* he has spent almost four times what a normal *chorēgos* might lay out.

Not all would-be *chorēgoi* participated with enthusiasm, however. It was possible to be exempted from liturgical service, and we know also of a mechanism, called the *antidosis*, where a person designated to perform a liturgy, could challenge another whom he thought wealthier than himself to take on that role. Aristophanes at *Acharnians* 1150–72 (425-L) blasts a *chorēgos* named Antimachos for some sort of unfriendly behavior after the festival, and at *Peace* 1019–20 implies that the particular *chorēgos* of this comedy is somewhat less than generous. At Eupolis F 329 someone exclaims, “Have you ever met a more stingy *chorēgos*?” We detect a comic stereotype here, the less-than-generous sponsor.

A *chorēgia* provided an opportunity for the *chorēgos* to revel in the splendor of his position. This moment of glory was part of their return for undertaking the expense of sponsoring a dramatic performance. We know that Alkibiades (451–403) wore a special purple robe when he served as *chorēgos* and that Demosthenes in the 340s had prepared gold crowns and a tunic sewn with gold for his service as a dithyrambic *chorēgos*. In the victory-lists the name of the victorious *chorēgos* is given before that of the winning poet: “[for 473/2] comedy: Xenokleides was the *chorēgos*, Magnes the *didaskalos*; tragedy: Perikles of Cholargai was the *chorēgos*, Aeschylus the *didaskalos*.” Perhaps a modern equivalent is the announcement of the award for Best Picture at the Academy Awards, where the name read out is that of the producer (often virtually unknown), rather than the high-profile director or the leading actors. But in the public atmosphere at Athens the *chorēgos* was someone whom everyone would know – the *chorēgos* himself would see to that. After the announcement of the results an exuberant procession led the victors to a sacrifice and celebration of the victory.

A visible sign of a *chorēgos*’ triumph was the erection of a permanent memorial to display the bronze tripod awarded to the winning *chorēgos*. These tripods were large (some over three meters high) and expensive (costing over 1000 drachmas), and were dedicated by mounting them on a stone base, with an inscription commemorating the event. We know that the main street leading from the *agora* around the north-east slope of the Acropolis to the east (main) entrance of the theater was called “Street of the Tripods” (map 1.3), and that it was one of the most prominent and favored walking areas of Athens. The monument commemorating Lysikrates, the victorious *chorēgos* in 334 (fig. 1.4), has survived in quite reasonable condition, and remains a popular tourist attraction just off Vironos Street in modern Athens. The monument of Thrasylllos (319) was an enclosure set into the hillside above the theater and closed with elaborate gates (fig. 1.5).

Of the three genres of performance at the Dionysia the sponsorship of tragedy held the most prestige and formed the highest rung on the liturgical ladder. When Demosthenes (21.156) insists that sponsoring a dithyramb was more expensive than tragedy, he is contrasting his own *chorēgia* with a dithyramb with the sponsorship of tragedy by his opponent Meidias. At the City Dionysia of the year 406/5 two *chorēgoi* shared the expense of sponsoring the productions on that occasion (Σ *Frogs* 405). This was a time of financial hardship for Athens because of the loss of income from the silver mines, the need to import food due to the enemy’s ravaging of the fields of Attica, and the tremendous expense of rebuilding and outfitting the Athenian navy, and rather than stint on the splendor of the festival, the Athenians preferred to maintain standards by doubling the *chorēgia*.



Map 1.3 Theater of Dionysos (classical period).

We do not know how *chorēgoi* and poets were matched. For the dithyrambs the *chorēgos* would come from the tribe whose men or boys were competing, but for drama we cannot say whether the *chorēgos* or the poet had any say in the assignment. Some good evidence for the Thargelia, where dithyrambs were performed, reveals that the *chorēgos* received his poet by lot, but this may just mean that the *chorēgos* who won the lot was able to choose first. In some cases there does seem to be a close relationship between dramatist and *chorēgos*. In 476 Themistokles, the architect of the victory over the Persians in 480, acted as sponsor for the productions by **Phrynichos** that included his *Phoenician Women*, a tragedy that dramatized the story of that defeat of the Persians. In 472 the *chorēgos* for Aeschylus' *Persians*, which covered much the same material as Phrynichos, was the young **Perikles**, who would become heir to Themistokles' politics. We wonder about Xenokles of Aphidna who was *chorēgos* for Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in 458. In the third play of that trilogy Aeschylus brings in contemporary political issues. How did Xenokles feel about these issues? In his *Trojan Women* of 415 Euripides seems to allow the preparations for the Armada against Sicily to intrude into his dramatization of the fall of Troy. Did Euripides' *chorēgos* share his hostility to aggressive war? How would a *chorēgos* from the *nouveaux riches* react to sponsoring a conservatively minded political comedy by Aristophanes or Eupolis?

The dramatic presentations were competitions. This should not surprise us since today some of the most popular world-wide cultural events are awards ceremonies



Figure 1.4 *Lysikrates Monument, Athens. Photo by I.C. Storey.*

(the Academy Awards, the Palme d'Or in Cannes, the Emmy Awards for television, the Grammys for popular music, the Man Booker Prize for fiction, etc.). We know also the ancient Greeks were an intensely competitive people, for whom the great cycle of competitions were major events in the life of that society. The Pythian Games at Delphi began as competitions in music and poetry before the athletic events were added, and musical contests were part of the four-yearly festival of the Panthenaia ("All-Athenian") at Athens. When the Athenian populace was divided into ten tribes in the last decade of the sixth century, each tribe performed a dithyramb, the large-scale choral song, one for fifty men and one for fifty boys. It must have seemed natural to them that these performances would be judged and prizes awarded.



Figure 1.5 *Theater of Dionysos, looking toward the Acropolis. The square recess is the Thrasyllus Monument. Photo by Ian Vining.*

There were ten judges, one from each of the ten tribes, appointed or selected in some manner that we do not know. Plutarch tells a story about the Dionysia of 468, when the ten *stratēgoi* (“generals” the ten political and military leaders of Athens, elected yearly) were compelled by the archon to judge the contest for tragedy and awarded the prize to the young Sophokles, competing for the first time. But the story is late (ca. AD 100, nearly 500 years after the event) and sounds rather too good to be true. The judges would take an oath to judge fairly – as do two representative officials at the opening of the modern Olympics – and each judge would cast his vote for the winning entry, be it in the dithyramb for boys and for men, tragedy, or comedy. Of these ten votes only five were selected by lot – lot being used in Athenian practice to forestall bribery of public officials – and the prizes awarded on the basis of these five votes. The speaker of Lysias’ fourth oration states clearly that his adversary had been a judge at the festival, and that “he wrote his vote on his tablet, but was excluded by the lot” (4.3).

Obviously there could be problems. One that springs quickly to mind is that a particular playwright could have the support of seven of the ten judges, but if the five unused votes were all for him, he could lose by three votes to two – assuming that the other three all voted for the same rival. How were ties broken? Suppose a particular tragic competition resulted in two votes for A, two votes for B, and one vote for C. Was the judge for C pressed to break the tie, or was the vote of a sixth judge employed? Results, one suspects, could have been controversial and perhaps

even made an item on the agenda of the *ekklēsia* that examined the conduct of the competition. The most thorough summary of the judging is that of Marshall and Van Willigenburg (2004).

Comedy, as befits its tendency to break the dramatic illusion and call attention to itself, often mentions and even addresses the judges (*kritai*) directly. The choruses of both *Clouds* (423 – lines 1115–30) and *Birds* (414 – lines 1102–17) speak briefly to the judges within their dramatic role on why they should award their play first prize and threaten the dire consequences of a negative decision. At the end of *Assembly-Women* (392 – lines 1154–62) the chorus of women appeals openly to the judges for the poet – note the singular “me”:

I wish to give the judges a bit of advice: to the clever among you remember the clever bits and vote for me, to those among you who like to laugh vote for me because of the jokes. I'm asking just about everyone to vote for me. And don't let the order of the draw tell against us, because I was drawn first. Keep this in mind and don't break your oaths, but judge all the choruses fairly, and don't behave like second-rate whores who remember only their last lover.

This is a significant passage for the study of ancient drama (in particular, comedy) since it provides evidence for the existence of different sorts of audience, the oath of the judges, that the order of the plays was determined by lot, and that a poet could make last-minute changes to his play once he knew the order of production.

Did the judges take popular reaction into account? Today at the Academy Awards it is almost automatic that the highest grossing or most popular movie of the year will not do well in the awards, but one wonders if the judges could have ignored a popular groundswell of approbation or disapproval. Comedy does appeal directly to the judges, but also to the spectators. In fact it is significant that Aristophanes blames the failure of his first *Clouds* (423-D) not on the judges, but on the spectators at large, at *Clouds* 518–62 and again at *Wasps* 1043–59:

And furthermore he swears by Dionysos over many libations that you never heard better comedy than this [first *Clouds*], and it is to your shame that you did not realize it at once. But our poet is no less recognized by the clever ones among you . . . so, my good friends, in the future love and cherish those poets who seek to say something new.

Again the poet suggests that there may be different tastes among the spectators, although the appeal may just be a flattering attempt for every spectator to consider himself “clever.” Aelian (early third century AD) records that at the production of the first *Clouds* of Aristophanes the audience shouted down to the judges to award first prize to that comedy, when that play finished third. Plato (*Laws* 659a–b) complains that judges are too influenced by the roar of the crowd in rendering their verdicts in favor of those who provide the spectators with an unseemly and indecent pleasure.

Crowns of laurel or ivy or roses were symbolic of celebrations and triumphs in ancient culture. Winning athletes, victorious poets, participants at sacrifices, guests at dinner-parties and symposia, messengers announcing victories wore crowns

(*stephanoi*) as symbols of their special situation. The winning dramatic poet, as well as the *chorēgos*, would have been awarded such a crown after the final production. The proclamation was probably made in the name of the winning poet; the opening scene of *Acharnians* (425) shows that the herald formally invited the poet to “bring on your chorus.” Private celebrations followed the public occasion. Plato’s *Symposium* purports to be an account of the party on the night following the actual victory-party, whose participants included two dramatists (**Agathon**, Aristophanes), all very much the worse for wear. Some comic by-play between Aristophanes and a fellow comic poet suggests that victorious poets might appear in triumph, as it were, at the gymnasium. Aristophanes implies that their motive was to pick up star-struck boys, but we do know that the gymnasia were popular gathering-places, where an exuberant victor might well make an appearance.

At *Frogs* 366–7 (405-L) the comic chorus declares certain individuals to be anathema and order that they be excluded from the festival. These include traitors to the state, those who like bad jokes, and: “the politician who nibbles away at the poets’ pay, just because he was made fun of in the ancestral rites of Dionysos.” Clearly the politician in question, identified by the scholiast as Archinos or Agyrrhios, had proposed reducing the *misthos* (“pay”) of the poets, probably because of serious economic constraints. The comic poet interprets this proposal as motivated by personal reasons, but it is good evidence that the poets did receive some financial support from the state. After all, putting on a play or group of plays would be a task of several months and would involve hands-on training of the actors and chorus. A poet or director would need to have recompense for the time required to stage the production. This raises again the question of the extent to which drama was “political” in that it was sponsored by the state.

The Theatrical Space

The classic lines of the theater at Epidauros (see fig. 1.2) will be familiar to many. Set against a stunning natural backdrop and about 90 percent intact, this theater appears regularly and prominently in the standard guides and handbooks about ancient drama. We admire the ornate entrance-ways, the perfectly round *orchēstra* (especially when viewed from the air), the mathematical precision of the wedges and rows where the spectators sat, the elaborate and perfectly curved stone benches, and the acoustics by which those in the last row can hear clearly what is said or sung in the center of the *orchēstra* (which the modern guide is happy to demonstrate). But this was not the sort of theater that Aeschylus or Aristophanes had at their disposal at Athens in the fifth century. The theater at Epidauros was built in the mid fourth century and was intended to be a state-of-the art construction. Comparing the theater at Epidauros with that in fifth-century Athens is like a putting a modern domed stadium beside an ivy-clad baseball park or a terraced football ground.

Even when we go to Athens, the remains of the later structures dominate what we see and it is with difficulty that we imagine the layout that playwrights, performers, and spectators had to work with in the fifth century. Today (see fig. 1.1) we see a

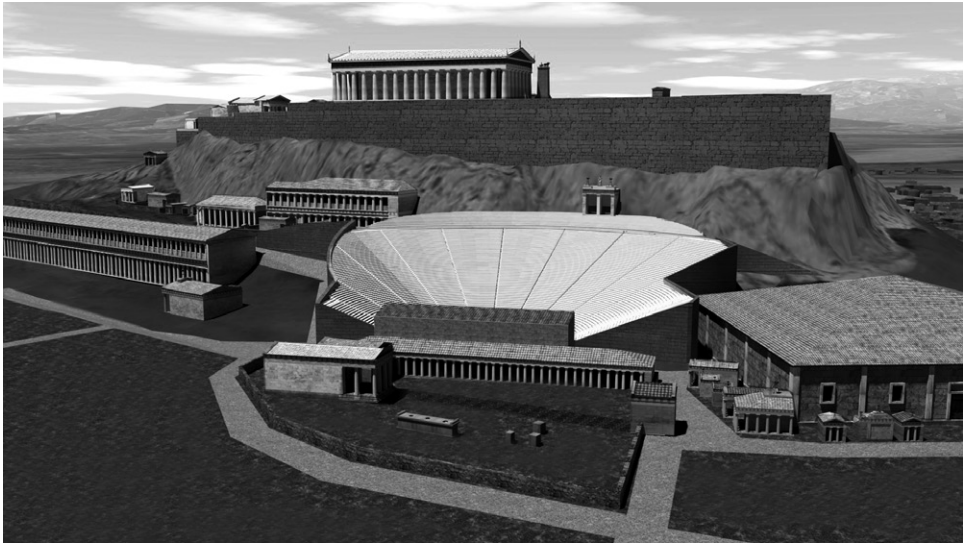


Figure 1.6 *South slope of the Acropolis (artist's reconstruction). Reproduced courtesy of Dimitrios Tsalkalis, www.ancientathens3d.com.*

round *orchēstra*, nicely paved with marble flagstones and surrounded by a stone drainage ditch, curving rows of stone benches with cross-ramps and aisles, elaborate thrones in the front row for the priests of various civic cults, and a massive elevated platform with steps set halfway across the *orchēstra*. All of this postdates the fifth century. Around 330 BC the Athenian statesman Lykourgos had the theater rebuilt in stone and added the lavish touches that we see today. Finally the modern backdrop of the theater is a bustling and busy twenty-first-century metropolis – in classical times the fields and mountains around Athens would have made this a setting surrounded by nature. We have to exercise our imagination to see what was there when the great tragic and comic poets competed in the fifth century.

A *theatron* was a “watching space” and in its simplest form consisted of a slope on a hillside with a flat area at the bottom where the performers sang and danced. This flat space was called an *orchēstra* or “dancing place.” In modern usage “orchestra” denotes the lower part of the house or the collection of musicians before or beneath the playing area, but to the Greeks it was the “dancing place.” Scholars seeking a rustic origin for drama suggested that this *orchēstra* developed from the round threshing-floor, on which, it is suggested, country songs and dances were performed after the harvest and threshing were finished. But not all early “dancing floors” were perfectly round and drama seems to have developed in the urban environment at Athens. The theater was located on the south-east slope of the Acropolis, on the opposite side from the *agora*, the center of Athenian daily life. It was next to, but not part of, the area sacred to Dionysos, and we will discuss below whether drama was in any way Dionysian, or merely linked by an accident of geography.

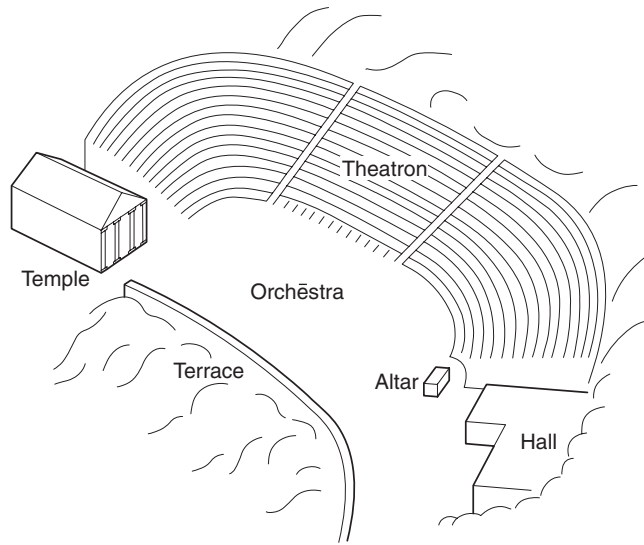
The (late) evidence that we have for the Lenaia suggests that performances at that festival were originally held in the *agora*, where an *orchēstra* and temporary benches were located. When ca. 440 the production of comedy and tragedy at the Lenaia became a formally state-sponsored competition, these will have been moved to the formal theater, although some argue that production continued in the *agora* through to the end of the fifth century. On this theory at least four of Aristophanes' extant eleven comedies were produced in a different venue from that of the comedies at the Dionysia, and indeed some scholars believe that they can detect differences in staging between comedies at the Dionysia and those at the Lenaia. When Dikaiopolis at *Acharnians* 504 insists that "the contest is at the Lenaia," does he mean "at the Lenaia festival" or "in the Lenaia theater"? Probably the former.

The perfectly circular *orchēstra* at Epidauros and its nice semi-circle with elegantly curved stone benches for the spectators have overly influenced our view of the ancient Athenian theater. To begin with, the hollow on the south-east slope of the Acropolis was not a neat semi-circle, although by the Hellenistic and Roman eras such a semi-circle had been created (see map 1.3). A perfect semi-circle provides the best sight-lines for the greatest number and is thus naturally "democratic," and although the lower part of the *theatron* at Athens did surround the *orchēstra* by a little more than 180 degrees, the majority of the spectators were sitting in front of the playing area. On the western side (audience's right) the rows of the *theatron* did not extend to any great degree, and on the audience's left intruded the large Odeion, built by Perikles around 440. Thus in the fifth century dramas would be played more frontally than in a perfectly semi-circular theater.

At *Women at the Thesmophoria* 395 the men are described as "coming straight home from the benches (*ikria*)."

Other ancient sources suggest that dramas were originally performed in the *agora* in front of spectators seated on *ikria*, before performances were moved to the south-east slopes of the Acropolis. While it is possible that "benches" was a term carried over from the early performances in the *agora* and that spectators sat merely on the ground itself, we should imagine the spectators of the fifth century seated on something that would have resembled the bleacher seating in high-school gymnasias or beside football fields. Obviously the benches could be arranged in some sort of roughly angled pattern, but the neatly curved rows of seating must await the rebuilding of the theater in stone by Lykourgos in the fourth century. At both Thorikos, a regional deme-theater in the south-east of Attica (see map 1.4), and the fifth-century theater at Argos (see fig. 1.3) the evidence reveals for the most part rows of straight front-facing seating. We have good evidence that the state leased out seating rights and that these costs were recovered by charging spectators for a seat on the benches. Roselli (2011) has suggested attractively that a smaller formal seating area would allow for others to sit farther up on the hillside and thus avoid the formal fee of admission.

Below the spectators extended the *orchēstra*. Most of the Greek theaters that have survived are heavily altered by later developments, one of which was the perfectly circular *orchēstra*. Dörpfeld, the German archaeologist who excavated the area of the Athenian theater in the 1880s, called attention to a series of seven stones arranged (in his view) in an arc. These, he insisted, formed the ring of a circular *orchēstra* some



Map 1.4 *Theater at Thorikos.*

twenty-four meters across, slightly to the south and east of the present *orchēstra*. Some have challenged the findings of Dörpfeld, wondering if the arc existed at all, and argue that the *orchēstra* in theaters of the fifth century was more rectangular or trapezoidal than circular. Certainly the *orchēstra* in the regional deme-theater of Thorikos is hardly circular (map 1.4). But the original songs and dances, the dithyrambs which were still part of the Dionysia in the classical period, were called the “circular choruses.” These employed choruses of fifty men or boys, and the description, “circular chorus,” seem to imply a circular performance space. Tragedy and comedy came later and would have adapted themselves to the traditional space. That a local deme-theater such as that at Thorikos did not have the same features as the theater at Athens is not surprising. Touring companies have always had to adapt down to the local space.

When one enters an ancient theater today, one is drawn, almost magnetically, to the center, and at Epidauros and Athens this spot is marked out by a significant stone. It is often assumed that an altar stood here, although at Thorikos what seems to be the altar lies on the audience’s left of the *orchēstra*. A working altar in the middle would immobilize the central focus for any dramatic action, and there are several places where characters gather around a central point: the tomb of Agamemnon in the first half of *Libation-Bearers*, the statue of Athene in *Eumenides*, the altar of Zeus in *Children of Herakles* around which the sons of Herakles take refuge. This would allow a significant interaction between characters and chorus, the latter circling the central tableau in their dances. To leave the crucial focus unencumbered, a functional altar should be at the side in the theater or in front of the nearby temple of Dionysos.

The earliest theatrical space would have consisted of spectators on the hillside and the playing area below. Indeed the earliest three plays that we have, Aeschylus’

Persians, *Seven*, and *Suppliants*, need only this much space for staging. There is no suggestion of a building in the background and all exits and entrances are made from the sides. To be sure in *Persians* the tomb of the dead king is a physical and visible entity, and at line 681 the ghost of Dareios appears above this tomb, but this can be handled in a number of ways – perhaps by a temporary structure at the back of the *orchēstra* near the drop to the terrace below. Actors and chorus thus originally shared the same performing space, with no area reserved for or associated with the actors separate from the chorus, or with any formal structure at the rear. From the level of the theater the hillside drops to the precinct of Dionysos, and a terrace wall on the south side of the *orchēstra* probably marked that boundary of the playing space.

Characters and chorus can enter the *orchēstra* from either side. At Epidauros (see fig. 1.2) and in other later theaters these entrances (*eisodoi*) are formal structures, with a framed doorway on either side. In the earliest theater characters must have just walked onto the playing-space. At *Clouds* 327 (423 or ca. 418) a character indicates the chorus' arrival "there by the *eisodoi*," which implies more than just a general location but an actual structure. Clearly characters take a while to make their entrance, and would have been visible for some time before they actually set foot in the *orchēstra*. Thus arrivals are generally announced by the chorus or another character on stage:

Chorus: But here is Haimon, last-born of your children. Does he come here upset over the fate of Antigone, his destined bride, grieving for the loss of his marriage? (*Antigone* 626–30)

Orestes: Look, there I see my best of friends, Pylades, running here from Phokis, a welcome sight. (*Orestes* 725–7)

There must have been some dramatic tension between spectators who saw these characters about to enter and the players on stage who remained theatrically unaware of their approach. When a character appears without an introduction (Corinthian messenger in *Oedipus*), spectators may well have wondered who this newcomer was.

By 458 the third element of the Athenian theater has emerged, the *skēnē* building at the rear of the *orchēstra*. Look at the elaborate backdrop to Hellenistic and Roman theaters and the observer sees multi-storied structures in stone with lavish decorations, but at Athens in the fifth century, such was not the case. The word *skēnē* means "booth" or "tent," and here we should imagine not the pup-tent familiar from camping, but something like a pavilion. It would have been a useful place to store stage properties and to allow the actors to change costumes, and may have already served to represent some unseen interior space in the plays. Such a structure would have been a temporary one, for it would not be needed for the "circular choruses" on the opening day of the Dionysia, and the very term *skēnē* ("booth," "tent") suggests something non-elaborate and non-permanent. In Euripides' *Ion* (lines 1128–66) we get a description of the formal pavilion (*skēnai*) which Xouthos has erected for the celebration to introduce his newly found son. At the fourth-century theater in Megalopolis we can see the remains of an alcove on one side, where the *skēnē*-building could be stored and put in place when needed (fig. 1.7).



Figure 1.7 Theater at Megalopolis. Photo by Matt Maher. *Skēnē* storage area indicated in left center.

But in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (458) we find a formal structure on the far side of the acting area; particularly significant are its door and roof. Characters enter and leave as before by the *eisidoi* on either side of the *orchēstra*, but now the door of the *skēnē* building provides a third formal entrance, used to great effect in *Agamemnon*. As Taplin (1978: 33) puts it well, Klytāimēstra in that play "controls the threshold," and the entrances from and exits to the unknown space beyond the door form a major dramatic device of the first two plays of the *Oresteia*. In two versions of "Orestes' revenge" (*Libation-Bearers*, Sophokles' *Elektra*) the plot turns entirely on how to get into the palace. At some point at Athens in the classical period a small stoa (colonnade) was constructed behind the *skēnē*-building with its back to the theater and would have provided a permanent backdrop for the action. This stoa is usually dated to the rebuilding by Lykourgos in the fourth century, but might be as early as 400.

At Epidauros or at the fourth-century theater at Delphi (fig. 1.8) the remains of stone foundations lie outside the *orchēstra*, but the evidence for the earlier theaters suggests that the *skēnē*-building lay partly within the circle of the *orchēstra*. Otherwise there could be a disjunction of the playing spaces, if the *skēnē* were removed completely from the *orchēstra*. The presence of the *skēnē*-building also makes possible different *foci* for the action – especially true in *Libation-Bearers* (458), where the first half of the drama is played about the tomb of Agamemnon, located in the center of the *orchēstra*, and the second half around the central door in the *skēnē*. As in *Agamemnon* control of this doorway is of essential dramatic importance. In *Frogs* (405), the



Figure 1.8 *Theater at Delphi. Photo by I.C. Storey.*

first part of the play, the adventures of Dionysos en route to the Underworld, is played in the *orchēstra*, with the action shifting to the door to Plouton's palace in the second. In both tragedy and comedy we find formal scenes where a character knocks at a door to gain admittance (in tragedy the disguised Orestes at *Libation-Bearers* 653–67, in comedy at *Frogs* 460–78). Often this request is refused or delayed with dramatically suspenseful or humorous results.

As the fifth-century *skēnē*-building was of wood, we cannot determine its appearance with any accuracy. The dramatic texts themselves may shed some light on what the spectators saw and the performers employed. Although there may have been a tent or shed there in the earliest years of tragedy, a formal structure seems to have been first used around 460. As the watchman who opens *Agamemnon* (458) calls attention first to the palace and then to his position on the roof, it is an attractive conclusion that Aeschylus is highlighting this new aspect of the Athenian theater, perhaps on its very first occasion: “The gods I ask for release from my labours, this year-long watch that I keep lying on top of the palace of Atreus.” Later in the play Klytaimnestra will insist that her husband walk into the palace on a blood-red carpet, and then will reappear to compel Kassandra to do so as well. Thus by 458 we can infer for the *skēnē* both a major door and a usable roof and we may add two further playing areas to the *theatron*: the area before the door, and the roof of the *skēnē*.

Fourth-century vases (e.g., fig. 4.2) reveal that this door consisted of a pair of panels opening inward, and in several plays it marks out significantly different worlds for the dramatic action. In *Oresteia* the door hides an unknown area, where characters go to die, while in *Antigone*, the world of death lies off stage down one of the *eisodoi*, leaving the door as the entrance to the safe and ordered world of daily life. In *Ion* the *skēnē* represents the temple of Apollo and characters enter and leave the world of that god of wisdom, although there is an uncomfortable feeling that all is not well inside that temple. In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* the barred doors represent the gates of the Acropolis behind which the women have sealed themselves. The *skēnē* can represent a variety of physical structures: temples (that of Zeus in *Children of Herakles*), sanctuaries (that of Demeter in *Suppliant Women*), palaces (the house of Atreus in *Agamemnon* or Sophokles' *Elektra*, or that in Thebes in *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone*), private houses (that of Herakles in *Herakles* or *Trachinian Women*), a tent (as in *Hecuba* or *Ajax*), and a cave (as in *Philoktetes* or *Cyclops*). Unusual physical settings occur in *Oedipus at Kolonos*, where the door marks the entry to the sacred grove of the Eumenides, and in Euripides' *Elektra*, where Elektra and her "husband" dwell in a country shack, "worthy of some farm labourer or a cow-herd" (252).

How many doors did the *skēnē* have? In Menander's comedy *The Grouch* (316) the speaker of the prologue, the god Pan, identifies three distinct dwellings behind three doors: the sanctuary of the Nymphs in the center, the house of Knemon (the focus of the action), and that of Gorgias. Clearly in the rebuilt theater of the late fourth century (see fig. 1.8) there were three distinct doors of roughly equal importance. But no tragedy of the fifth century needs more than one door, an entrance that can have an immense dramatic significance. But in fifth-century comedy there are instances where more than one door seem to be necessary. In *Clouds* Strepsiades and his son are sleeping outside the house, from which a slave emerges with various items and into which the son departs at line 125. In the midst of all this Strepsiades points out the "think-shop" of Sokrates (93):

Do you see that little door and that small house over there?

The action can be played with only one door, used first as Strepsiades' house and then as the "think-shop" of Sokrates, but some prefer a smaller side-door for Strepsiades' house. Again at 790–815, where Sokrates re-enters his "think-shop" and Strepsiades his own house, the scene plays more easily with more than one door. In *Peace* the goddess is shut up in a cave from which she must be drawn out – this has to be the central door of the *skēnē* – but Trygaios has his own house to which he returns at line 800. In Eupolis (F 48) we hear that "three of them live here, each in his own shack." The natural conclusion is that this comedy had three distinct and operative doors.

But if comedy could and did use three doors, why does no extant tragedy seem to? Does it have something to do with the ethos of the genres? We know that there was a gulf in popular and artistic perception between the two. Tragedy almost invariably maintains the dramatic fiction and rarely, if ever, calls attention to itself as an artistic construct, while Old Comedy, at least, regularly punctures the dramatic illusion and

involves the spectators in the action unfolding before them. No tragic poet in the fifth century is ever known to have written comedy, and vice versa. Was the use of one door somehow more solemn or distinguished than the use of three, or the three-door *skēnē* somehow seen as more “comic”? The comedies of the fifth century can, with difficulty, be played with one door, and there are places in the surviving tragedies where more than one door could be used. In *Trojan Women*, for instance, the captives are described as confined “in these buildings,” and “with them Helen.” The central door could suffice for the entries of the chorus (at line 151) and subsequently that of Helen (line 895), but if there were another door available, it might have made good drama to bring Helen out through a different entry.

Certain comic texts suggest that the *skēnē*-building had windows, at which characters could be seen and interact with those in the *orchēstra*. At *Wasps* 317–32 the imprisoned Philokleon sings a song of lament “through the opening” to the chorus of elderly jurors gathered below. At *Assembly-Women* 951–75 a young woman inside the house sings a love duet with her boyfriend outside. Again a window is ideal for the young woman to be seen and heard. Several South Italian vases of the fourth century show figures at windows in what must be scenes from a comic production.

A hotly debated matter is whether a low platform or “stage” lay between the *orchēstra* and the *skēnē*-building. Modern productions at Epidauros routinely employ such a raised platform with wide steps leading up from the *orchēstra* to the *skēnē* itself. In both tragedy and comedy we see an increasing role for the actor at the expense of the chorus, and by the fourth century actors become “stars” in the sense that we understand them. A raised platform, it is argued, reflects that increasing role of the actors and creates their own space apart from that of the chorus for whom the “dancing place” was their natural terrain. But a raised platform against the *skēnē* would hardly have served actors in a theater where the great majority sat above and looked down. Nor do the dramas of the fifth century reveal a marked separation of actors and chorus; in fact they interacted as much as they were separated. In *Agamemnon* the chorus approaches the *skēnē*-door when they hear the death-cries from within; in *Eumenides*, *Suppliant Women*, and *Oedipus at Kolonos* the chorus surrounds a figure taking refuge at the center of the *orchēstra*. In *Eumenides* and *Trojan Women* the chorus enters from the *skēnē*-building, rather than from the side. In *Frogs* Dionysos can race across the *orchēstra* to appeal to his priest in the front row for protection from the monsters (fig. 1.9).

There are some places in comedy where a character is invited to “come up.” In *Knights* the Sausage-Seller has just entered by one of the *eisodoi* and has attracted the attention of the slaves across the *orchēstra* (147–9): “O wonderful sausage-seller, come here, come here, my friend. Come up and show yourself as savior to us and to the city.” Some argue that this means to come up from the *orchēstra* to a raised playing area, and comic scenes on vases of the fourth century show steps leading up to what is clearly a stage, on which there appears the double door of the *skēnē*. If there was a separate raised playing-area at the rear of the *orchēstra* and before the *skēnē*, the steps were few enough and sufficiently wide to allow easy interaction between chorus and actors. On the other hand, “up” may mean only dramatically “up.” “Come up” can



Figure 1.9 *Throne of the Priest of Dionysos Eleuthereus. Photo by I.C. Storey.*

work equally well as “come up onto this platform where we are” or just “come forward to the focus of attention.”

Recent studies in theater production have shown that the crucial area for performance in an ancient theater, either by a chorus or by an actor, was the line that connects the center of the *orchēstra* to the central door of the *skēnē*. An actor in the front half of the *orchēstra* does not command the *theatron* visually or audibly as effectively as one farther back. This is precisely the area that a raised stage, if one existed in the fifth century, would have occupied, but modern theorists insist that such a stage is not necessary for effective production.

The roof of the *skēnē* was called the *theologeion* (“god-speaking place”), from which one might assume that its primary use was for the advent of deities, either at the start or close of the drama. But the first character that we know of to appear on the roof is a watchman at the start of *Agamemnon*, and other scenes confirm the presence of humans on the roof:

Menelaos: Look. What is this? I see the glow of torches, and these people taking refuge on the roof, and a sword held at my daughter’s throat. (*Orestes* 1573–5)

That in this scene at least four figures are gathered on the roof tells us something about the size of the *skēnē*-building in 408. Not all gods in drama will have appeared on the roof, but when a character tells others to “look up” at an apparition, the natural conclusion is that this apparition is on the roof of the *skēnē*:

Chorus: Look. Do you feel the same pulse of fear, seeing such an apparition above the house? (*Herakles* 816–17)

Obviously, then, the roof was accessible from the rear by a ladder or wooden stairs, but since many of the spectators would be looking down on the dramatic tableau, the advent of a character on the roof would take only the players and those in the lower rows by surprise. Such a suspension of realism was part of the dramatic conventions of the Athenian theater.

The ancient theater did not depend on “special effects” or the creation of reality in its productions. But two devices can be documented for the extant plays from the fifth century. First there was what is commonly called the *ekkyklēma* (“wheel out”), although that term is not found until very late sources. When comedy refers to such a scene, the verb *ekkyklein* is normally used. This was a wheeled device that could be rolled through the double doors in the *skēnē*, on which could be represented interior scenes *en tableau*. One ancient source describes its purpose as follows: “It would show things which appear to be happening indoors, e.g. in a house, to those outside as well (I mean the spectators).” One of its primary uses was to display those who had died within the *skēnē*-building. One such instance is found at *Hippolytos* 808–10 where Theseus calls for the doors to be opened:

Theseus: Servants, release the bars of the gate, unfasten the locks, so that I may see the bitter sight of my wife, who in her death has destroyed me.

Another occurs at *Herakles* 1028–30:

Chorus: Ah, ah, look. The double doors of the high-roofed house are opening. See the poor children lying in front of their ill-starred father.

It seems then that the use of the *ekkyklēma* was announced and that the spectators prepared to accept this fairly blatant stage convention. Modern critics suggest all sorts of scenes that might have been staged with the *ekkyklēma*, but unless we are alerted in some way by the text, it seems safer to restrict its use.

Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* (458) presents an interesting problem here. Two display-scenes occur in *Agamemnon* (1372) and *Libation-Bearers* (973), where first Klytaimnestra and then Orestes stands over the bodies of their victims. Here it is often assumed that these tableaux were staged on the *ekkyklēma*, while for *Eumenides*, the third play of this trilogy of 458, it has been suggested that some or all of the chorus of sleeping Furies enters through the *skēnē*-door on the *ekkyklēma*. Thus the *ekkyklēma* was part of the *skēnē*-building from the start, but some doubt that the *ekkyklēma* existed so early and object that we get no advance warning of an interior scene as we do in the examples

cited above. Perhaps announcing the use of the *ekkyklēma* was a convention that developed later in the century. If the chorus in *Eumenides* did enter in this fashion through the *skēnē*-door, then the wheeled platform was large and solid enough to carry twelve choristers plus the chairs on which they were slumped.

Comedy had great fun with the *ekkyklēma*. Tragedy required the spectators to suspend their disbelief and accept the dramatic illusion, especially when a potentially noisy device such as the *ekkyklēma* was employed. Comedy, on the other hand, reveled in disrupting the dramatic illusion, and would consciously call attention to the technique. Thus in *Acharnians* and *Women at the Thesmophoria* a tragic poet is “wheeled out” on the *ekkyklēma* in a self-conscious piece of theater:

Dikaïopolis: Euripides, dear sweet Euripides, hear me, if you have ever listened to any man. It's me, Dikaïopolis of Cholleidai, calling you.

Euripides: I don't have time.

Dikaïopolis: So wheel yourself out.

Euripides: No, I can't.

Dikaïopolis: Please.

Euripides: All right, I'll wheel myself out. (*Acharnians* 403–9)

What better way to call attention to the fact that the *ekkyklēma* is but an accepted convention than to bring a tragic poet on stage by that means?

The other piece of stage equipment is known as the *mēchanē* ('machine'), also known as the *geranos* ("crane") or *kradē* ("branch"). This was a device firmly anchored behind the *skēnē*-building, with a system of winch and pulleys, a wooden beam, and a harness by which characters could be presented as though flying through or hovering in the air. This device has given birth to our familiar phrase *deus ex machina* ("god from the machine"). A variety of suggestions has been offered to explain how the *mēchanē* worked. One ancient source talks of raising the *mēchanē* like a finger, and from the comic evidence (*Peace*, *Birds*) it is clear that a character could be raised from behind the *skēnē* to land in front. Thus the *mēchanē* could both raise and swivel. To modern eyes such a device with its visible cables and creaking machinery might seem hostile to the serious ethos of tragedy, but spectators were willing to participate by suspending belief, and those who enjoyed spectacle would eagerly await such a dramatic end to the play.

Comedy has fun with this dramatic device as well. *Clouds* has a famous scene in which Sokrates enters suspended from the *mēchanē* – “I am treading air and looking down on the Sun” (225). In *Peace* the *mēchanē* becomes a giant dung-beetle on which the main character Trygaios is carried to Olympos – a parody of Euripides' lost tragedy *Bellerophon*. In *Women at the Thesmophoria*, a play-length burlesque of Euripidean tragedy, Euripides himself enters at line 1098 on the *mēchanē* disguised as Perseus (from his recent *Andromeda*), while at 1199 *Birds* Iris flies in on the *mēchanē* to land at the newly founded city of Cloudcuckooland. Comedy thus uses the *mēchanē* to puncture the bubble of seriousness that surrounded its use in tragedy.

How large a load could the *mēchanē* bear? Usually only one person appears, and in cases where two deities appear above (Poseidon and Athene in *Trojan Women*, Iris and Madness in *Herakles*), an equally good case can be made for an epiphany on the roof. But in *Orestes*, Apollo and Helen certainly appeared on the *mēchanē*, and the two

Dioskouroi were swung onto the *skēnē*-roof in Euripides' *Elektra*. That the *mēchanē* was certainly used for Pegasos, for the world's largest dung-beetle, and a chariot for a god (in *Medea*) show that the device could be dressed up to accommodate more than a single human figure.

The first certain use of the *mēchanē* seems to have been in Euripides' *Medea* (431). It was used principally at the close of tragedies, often for the appearance of a deity to resolve or pronounce upon the action down below. But humans could and did appear on the *mēchanē* – Bellerophon entered upon Pegasos in two lost plays of Euripides, and at the end of *Medea* the heroine appears on the chariot of the Sun to spirit herself and the bodies of her children away. It is not always easy to determine whether a god at the end of a tragedy appears on the *skēnē*-roof or on the *mēchanē*. The presence of a chariot or the associations of motion should suggest an appearance on the *mēchanē*. Thus at *Andromache* 1225–30:

Chorus: Oh, oh, what is moving? What divinity is it I see? Look, see! This is a god that is carried through the bright sky and is landing on the horse-rearing plains of Phthia.

we may reasonably conclude that Thetis enters on the *mēchanē* and lands on the *thēologeion*. So too the Dioskouroi at *Elektra* 1230 move toward and light upon the palace. At times the deity might appear either on the *mēchanē* or upon the roof, e.g. Athene at the end of *Ion*, *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, and *Suppliant Women*, and the Dioskouroi in *Helen*. Perhaps when no attention is called to the actual arrival, we might infer an appearance on the roof rather than on the *mēchanē*.

One extraordinary scene in tragedy from the very late career of Euripides presents the simultaneous use of four performance-spaces. At the end of *Orestes* (1549–693), a brilliantly iconoclastic tragedy in a number of ways, the ancient spectators would have seen the chorus in their usual area (*orchēstra*), Menelaos and his followers hammering at the door of the *skēnē*-building, Orestes and others on the roof, and then on the *mēchanē* Apollo and the now-deified Helen. All four possible areas of performance were in use at the same time, and in the brief space of fifteen lines someone from each area will speak.

The Performance

We shall concentrate principally on the performances at the Dionysia, since it was the earliest dramatic competition, the one that likely carried the greater prestige, and the one about which we are best informed. The Dionysia was a five-day holiday, that was both religious (honoring the god Dionysos with appropriate parades and festivities) and civic, as it involved the ancient city as a whole in its observation. As mentioned above, the assembly would not meet, nor was normal business conducted, at least for the first day – indeed if the theater held at least 15,000 spectators (as some estimate), a good proportion of those engaged in daily business would be at the theater rather than in the *agora*. Thus the spectators were in one sense worshippers of Dionysos, a god honored by wine and a general sense of freedom, members of the

male citizen-body of Athens (there were also metics, foreign visitors, boys, and probably slaves and women), all full of the sense of the occasion and in search of entertainment and emotional diversion. One of the principal problems in the modern study of Greek drama is assessing the extent to which drama was a religious offering, an exploration of political identity, or an engaging piece of popular entertainment.

Plato speaks of dramas performed before 30,000 spectators, but even the largest of the ancient theaters (those at Megalopolis, Syracuse, and Ephesos) could not have held much more than 20,000. But even 12–15,000 spectators is an audience on a large scale, and thus the modern counterpart to the ancient theater is not the enclosed interior of a darkened hall, but the outdoor football stadium with all the dynamics of the large crowd. The usual entrance to the theater was from the east along the Street of the Tripods (see map 1.2), which wound its way from the *agora* around the north and east slopes of the Acropolis, past the Odeion of Perikles into the *theatron*. At *Acharnians* 26 the main character (Dikaiopolis) imagines the arrival of citizens in the assembly as filling up that space (the Pnyx, on a hill west of the Acropolis) from the top down, but unless there was a separate route around the north side of the Odeion, spectators would enter and fill the *theatron* from the bottom up. Spectators would thus enter the theater by the same *eisodos* that the players themselves would use.

In the later theaters of the Hellenistic and the Roman periods the *theatron* was divided by vertical aisles and at least one horizontal walkway (*diazōma*), creating the neat regular wedges of seating (*kerkides*) that are the hallmark of the ancient theater (see fig. 1.6). But in the fifth century the arrangements must have been far less formal, as spectators sat in benches and perhaps above on the hillside. The audience was principally composed of citizen males – comedy regularly addresses the spectators as *andres* (“men”), and on a couple of occasions the spectators are sub-divided into classes of males:

Now that you’ve enjoyed our triumph over that troublesome old man, youths, boys, men, applaud generously. (*The Grouch* 794)

... while I explain the plot to the boys, the young men, the grown men, the older men, and the very old men. (*Peace* 50–3)

Elsewhere a character in *Eupolis* (F 261) complains of a “frigid joke, only the boys are laughing,” and in *Clouds* Aristophanes accuses his vulgar rivals of bringing characters on stage with dangling red *phalloi* “so as to get a laugh out of the boys” (538–9). Thus we may assume with confidence that boys did attend the theater.

Passages from Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* (425) confirm the presence of foreigners at the theater. According to the main character, Kleon (a leading political demagogue) claimed that in a play at the Dionysia of the previous year, usually identified as Aristophanes’ *Babylonians*, Aristophanes had “said bad things about the city of Athens in the presence of foreigners (*xenoi*).” But now at *Acharnians* 504–8:

The contest is that at the Lenaia, and foreigners are not yet here. The tribute is not coming in, nor allies from the cities. We are here by ourselves, clean-hulled (so to speak), for I consider the metics to be the bran of our population.

We know also that metics were allowed to act as *chorēgoi* at the Lenaia and to perform in the choruses. But these were resident aliens and permanent members of the Athenian community, not full citizens admittedly, but men with a real stake in the life and prosperity of the city. As one of the preliminaries at the Dionysia was the presentation of the *phoros* (tribute), we may imagine that at that festival there would be a considerable number of visitors from the cities of the empire in attendance. By the end of March the sailing season had resumed and people would be able to travel to Athens.

But what about women? Could (did) women attend the theater in the fifth century? The issue has been hotly debated to no accepted conclusion. Ancient Athens was a male-dominated society – only males could vote in the *ekklēsia* and hold political office within the state – and much of the evidence, admittedly from upper-class sources, suggests that women lived in a sort of seclusion like that which we associate with certain Middle Eastern societies today. But women did have a public role within the state, both as tradespersons in the *agora* and principally in the area of what we would call “religion.” Women held priesthoods, attended festivals – the Thesmophoria was a women’s only festival, the Adonia very much a women’s celebration, and the main character in *Lysistrata* complains (1–3):

If they’d invited the women to the shrine of Dionysos, to that of Pan or one of the gods of love and passion, no-one could have got through the streets – tambourines everywhere.

Since the dramatic competitions were part of a religious festival (that of Dionysos), then why should women have been excluded or felt excluded from what was in part a religious observance? On the other side of the coin is the argument that the dramatic festivals were more civic and “political” occasions than religious festivals at which women would be inappropriate visitors.

Plato, writing in the fourth century, talks of tragedy as “a kind of rhetoric addressed to boys, women and men, slaves and free citizens without distinction,” and imagines in his ideal state that “people will not be eager to allow tragic poets to put their stages in the market-place and perform before women and children and the public at large” (*Gorgias* 502d). Elsewhere he argues that while older children prefer comedy, adult males and women of culture would choose tragedy. These passages suggest that in Plato’s time women were a natural and recognizable part of the audience. On the other hand, the comic passages mentioned above address only the males. If women did attend in the fifth or fourth century, perhaps they were present only in small numbers and seated in less prominent seating. Alexis F 42 describes women having to sit “in the last wedge of seats.” Henderson (1991: 144) postulates “a normative distinction between a notional audience of men (political) and an actual audience that included women (festive).”

Other evidence from comedy is susceptible of opposing interpretations. In *Women at the Thesmophoria* (389–91, 395–7) a woman complains about Euripides’ treatment of women in his tragedies:

Where has he not slandered us women, in any venue where there are spectators and tragic choruses . . . as soon as our husbands come home from the benches they give us searching looks and immediately start looking for our secret lovers.

On the surface this implies that women were not normally at the theater; on the other hand the women seem awfully well informed about how Euripides treats women in his plays. We should probably not treat this as an actual “window” into Athenian life, but rather a contrived situation for comic effect. Another passage from Aristophanes *Peace* (962–7) has been used both to support and reject the presence of women among the spectators

Trygaïos: Toss some barley-corns (*krithai*) to the spectators. Slave: Okay.
 Trygaïos: You’ve already given them out? Slave: By Hermes, yes, I have. And there’s no spectator who doesn’t have a barley-corn (*krithē*).
 Trygaïos: The women don’t have any. Slave: But the men will give them some tonight.

This passage is often interpreted that the women were sitting at the back of the *theatron*, where the barley-corns thrown by a slave would not have reached. But the word *krithē* (“barely-corn”) is also a slang term for the male penis, and the passage might read:

Trygaïos: Toss some barley-corns (*krithai*) to the spectators. Slave: Okay.
 Trygaïos: You’ve already given them out? Slave: By Hermes, yes, I have. And there’s no spectator who doesn’t have a barley-corn (*krithē*).
 Trygaïos: But women don’t have any. Slave: But the men will give them one tonight (nudge, nudge; wink, wink).

The whole business is a set-up, then, for the double meaning of *krithē* and is not solid evidence for the presence of women in the theater.

The spectators were given food and drink before and during the play. The fourth-century historian Philochoros claims that “throughout the whole event wine was poured out for them and snacks provided,” while Aristotle observes that “people who munch snacks in the theater do this especially when the acting is bad.” We can cite also the passage from *Peace* quoted above, as well as the prologue of *Wasps* where Aristophanes announces that his play will not have a pair of slaves throwing nuts out to the audience – the point being that his comedy will succeed on its dramatic merits, not through a largesse from the *chorēgos*. In *Wealth* (388) a pair of characters toy with the spectators, first promising to toss out fruit and nuts and then refusing on the grounds that such behavior “is not proper for a comic poet” (797–8).

The orators tell us that the Athenian court-room was a noisy and contentious affair, and we can imagine that the Athenian theater was much the same. Evidence from the fourth century describes spectators hissing and clucking at unpopular actors or poor performances, perhaps even hurling food to express discontent, and applauding wildly when pleased. One anecdote records that a controversial line from Euripides’ lost *Aiolos* aroused the spectators’ wrath, another that his *Danae* was stopped by an outraged audience and only resumed after the playwright urged them to see what would happen to the offending character. These may, however, just be fictions created after the fact as part of the stereotypical picture of Euripides as the *enfant terrible* of the Athenian stage. But the theater was a communal experience, with spectators sitting in

close proximity, able to pick up and transmit the emotional impulses that the performances would generate, be they the sadness and grief from tragedy or the exuberance and laughter of comedy. For Aristotle (*Poetics* chapter 6) the end of tragedy was the creation and *katharsis* of pity and fear, and we need to be reminded that the theater in classical Athens was not a detached cerebral exercise, but a shared emotional experience. We even know of a theatrical security force, called the *rhabdouchoi* (literally “rod-bearers”) whose duties seem to have included maintaining order in the *theatron*.

By the middle of the fourth century the Athenians had established the “Theoric Fund” (from the *thea-* root, “watch”) that allowed poorer Athenians to attend the theater by paying the two-obol admission fee. When this was introduced is a matter of controversy. It was clearly in place by the 340s when Demosthenes refers directly to the fund, but some of the sources attribute its introduction to Perikles in the third quarter of the fifth century, and another to the politician Agyrrhios in the 390s, although this last is probably a confusion with Agyrrhios’ institution of pay for attendance at the assembly.

Two obols was a reasonably high cost to attend the theater. Some recent critics have argued that in the fifth century this high cost of admission would have affected the composition of the audience, so that only those sufficiently well off could attend. This, it is suggested, explains the right-wing bias of Old Comedy – they were performing for the elite and not for a representative general public. But Roselli’s (2011) suggestion that many Athenians could have occupied the hillside above the benches (*proedria*): for public officials such as the *Boulē* (the council of 400 Athenians; at *Peace* 887, 905–6, and *Birds* 794 specific reference is made to separate seating for the *Boulē*), the archons, the ten generals, and the *nomophylakes* (“guardians of the laws”), for those being specially honored, and the *ephēboi* (young men doing their military service).

Conventions of the space

First it was a large space. Wiles (2000: 109) estimates that from the central door in the *skēnē* to the furthest row in the *theatron* was a distance of about 100 meters. Thus the sort of intimate performance that we associate with small theaters or even the close-up of the movie camera was not possible in the ancient theater. To a spectator seated at the back those performing below would seem only a few inches high. Thus there could not be a vast horde of speaking characters and the actors would need to be dressed distinctively to make them and their roles stand out, especially since they were masked and it might not be readily apparent who was speaking.

The theater was also a large communal space. Several thousand spectators were crowded into a restricted space, whether on benches, the later marble rows, or on the hillside. Thus the experience of attending the Greek theater may not have been that of individuals responding as individuals to the performance set before them, but of a community of spectators reacting *en masse* to the horror or the humor played out for them. Wiles (2000: 112) puts it powerfully:

The spectator 100 metres away was part of a single crowd, bounded by a space that created no vertical or horizontal boundaries, and concealed no group from the rest. If all 15,000-plus tightly packed people were listening to the same words at the same time, and shared the same broad response, the power of emotion generated would have been quite unlike that created today in a studio theater. Communication was effected not simply via light and sound waves but via an osmosis passing through the bodies of the spectators.

It was also an open space. Performances took place in the daytime, probably not long after daybreak – several plays call attention to the rising of the sun (e.g. *Antigone*, a poignant touch if this play were the first of its group). One would be aware of both the natural surroundings, the view over the south-east part of the city and thence out to the hills of the Mesogaia, and of the other spectators, the citizen-body of Athens and their visitors. Modern outdoor stadia are usually built to direct the spectators' view inwards towards the playing area and do not distract with a view of the natural setting, but for the Greeks *theatron* and natural background formed a harmony of setting and took the spectator from the individual drama unfolding below to the larger world of the natural environment. When gods appear at the end of a Greek play, their arrival could seem quite natural in light of the larger universe that surrounded the theater. In *Clouds* the spectators' attention is specifically directed out to the mountains and then back to the *theatron*.

The theatrical space formed also a community of the audience. Actors come into and go from the common space in front of and surrounded by the spectators and very often announce what has happened either off stage or behind the *skēnē*. There is an "outer" common world of the spectators and an "inner" world between which there are doorways of communication. The words of the drama bring the events of the unseen worlds before the spectators and through the brilliance of the writing they are able to imagine what has happened elsewhere. Very often we see a character leave the acting area and then a messenger picks up what happened when they arrived in the unseen world. Doors swing both ways in Greek drama.

"Theater of the mind"

This is Taplin's (1978: 9) useful phrase to describe the conventions of the Greek stage. Modern audiences are used to the creation of reality in front of them; they expect visual and aural effects that make the dramatic atmosphere "real" and believable. Much is written about the willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the spectator, and impressive and realistic effects do much to enable that suspension. We are used to the box theater, where we view the on-stage action through an open fourth wall, although modern thrust theaters, such as that at the Stratford Festival in Ontario, have created a more involved effect for that audience. In the Greek theater the spectators had to do much of the work themselves, to imagine places and settings, import information and relationships from the mythical tradition, visualize in their minds the events occurring off stage and narrated by others.

There were no programs with a list of characters and actors, the settings of the various acts and scenes, and the background information necessary for appreciating

the performance before a word was spoken. For the Dionysia there was the *proagōn* (“precontest”) just before the Dionysia itself, at which playwrights with their actors and chorus would announce in some fashion the subject of the forthcoming production, but in the case of comedy these probably tantalized and misled more than they informed. The words of the text told the spectators what they needed to know: where they were, who the characters were, and the elements of the plot-line that would develop. Take the opening of Euripides’ *Bacchae* for instance:

To this land of Thebes am I come, the son of Zeus, Dionysos, to whom once Semele, the daughter of Kadmos, gave birth with the lightning-bolt for midwife. Having exchanged my divine appearance for mortal form, I stand beside the streams of Dirke and the water of Ismenos. Over there near the palace I see the tomb of my mother who was struck by thunder and the ruins of her house still smoking with the flame of Zeus’ fire, the undying outrage of Hera against my mother.

Here the speaker tells us that we are before the palace at Thebes, that he is Dionysos disguised as a mortal, that his mother Semele gave him birth after being struck by the bolt of Zeus, and that the play will deal with the story of his return to Thebes.

To take an example from comedy, where the spectators would not know the background to the story, examine the opening lines of Menander’s *The Grouch*:

Now imagine, people, that the setting lies in Attica, at Phyle, and that the shrine of the Nymphs that I am coming out of is that of the people of Phyle and those who farm the rocky ground here – it’s a well-known place. In the farm-house on my right here lives Knemon, a real misanthrope . . . who never speaks to anyone first, except when he passes my shrine (I’m the god Pan).

Here the spectators learn the setting (Phyle on the rocky outskirts of Attica); the identity of the speaker (Pan); the space behind the central door (a shrine of the Nymphs); and the name, domicile, and personality of the main character (Knemon the *dyskolos*, “grouch”).

Very often the text announces the imminent arrival and identity of a character. Thus at *Antigone* 162 the chorus prefaces Kreon’s entry, “But here comes Kreon, the new ruler of the country,” and later Kreon’s son Haimon, Antigone’s betrothed, is announced in similar terms, “Here is Haimon, the last-born of your sons” (626). In the same play the entry of Kreon’s wife is announced at line 1180, and the return of Kreon himself at line 1260. On these occasions the spectators need to know who this figure is approaching along an *eisodos*. Sometimes a character arrives without introduction, but the audience is rarely kept in doubt. In *Antigone* Teiresias arrives without fanfare at line 988, but in a play set at Thebes the identity of a blind man walking with the aid of a boy would be obvious – just to be sure Kreon calls him “old Teiresias” at line 991. In *Alkestis* Herakles appears unexpectedly at line 476, but his traditional accoutrements of lion-skin and club will make his identity clear and at line 478 the chorus makes it abundantly so, “Admetos is indeed at home, Herakles.”

By the time of fourth-century comedy, the *eisodoi* had acquired distinct identities, that to the spectators’ right leading to a local scene, and that to the left a foreign

setting. Combined with the entrance via the *skēnē*, these could allow for some “mis-direction” on the poet’s part. The spectators, expecting an entry from one side, would be surprised either by a character entering via a different entry or by an unexpected development. Such a moment occurs at line 924 of *Oedipus Tyrannos*. At the end of the previous scene Oedipus and Jokaste have sent for the herdsman who survived the encounter where three roads meet. A messenger has been dispatched through the local *eisodos*, while the chorus sings the second *stasimon* (863–910), and Jokaste reappears through the *skēnē*-door to make an offering at the statue of Apollo (911–22). She, the chorus, and spectators will be watching the local *eisodos* for the expected herdsman, but from the other *eisodos* without warning or announcement enters the messenger from Corinth to take the plot in an unforeseen direction.

The spectators are often prepared for the identity and entry of the chorus. In tragedy they normally enter from one of the *eisodoi* after an introductory scene (or scenes) involving the actor(s), but in two early plays by Aeschylus (*Persians*, *Suppliants*), they are already in the *orchēstra* when the action begins. Twice in the extant tragedies they enter through the *skēnē*-door, in *Eumenides* (perhaps on the *ekkyklēma*) and in *Trojan Women*, where the *skēnē* represents the tents in which the captive women are being held. Choral identities in tragedy are not that unusual, e.g. elders of the state, handmaidens, townsfolk, and thus their identity is not always specifically announced. But at lines 55ff. of the prologue of *Bacchae* mentioned above, Dionysos prepares the spectators for the entry of the chorus of his female followers from the East. In Old Comedy, where the entire situation is composed *de nouveau*, the spectators are always told something about the chorus before they enter, as at *Acharnians* 178–85:

I was hurrying here bearing peace treaties for you, when some old Acharnians sniffed them out . . . I ran away, but they’re following me and shouting

or at *Wasps* 214–16:

But they’ll be here soon, his fellow-jurors, to summon out my father.

In the eleven surviving comedies of Aristophanes the chorus invariably enters along the *eisodos*, often rushing violently on stage – as at *Knights* 247, “get him, get him, get the villain.” By the time of Menander (late fourth century) the chorus enters to sing interludes between the acts, and in an early play (*The Grouch*) their identity and arrival are announced to the spectators:

I see some worshippers of Pan heading this way, and they’ve been drinking. I think it’s a good time for me to get out of here. (230–2)

Choros is related to the Greek verb *choreuein* (“to dance”). Again modern usage gets in the way, since for us a chorus is a singing group or the refrain of a song. But Greek drama must have been more balletic than our modern theater. We should perhaps look to the Broadway or West End musical for a modern analogue to Greek drama. Clearly certain forms of dance will have suited certain dramatic situations – we know

of a war dance, an “Athena-dance,” the vulgar comic *kordax*, the distinctive *sikinnis* in satyr-drama, and at the end of *Wasps* the main character engages in a vigorous dancing-contest with Karkinos and his sons. It is easy enough for us to envisage dance as part of a romantic or comic musical, but it takes more effort to imagine how the more serious form of tragedy would have incorporated dance. Scenes of mourning and lamentation will have had their own particular physical expression. We can imagine the chorus in *Oedipus at Kolonos* miming the off-stage battle with movements of a martial turn, all the more effective if these were older men. In *Eumenides* the chorus of Furies track and surround the fugitive Orestes, encircling him with a binding song of enchantment. We can only imagine the power that the dance of the Angry Goddesses would have evoked. There may not be much “action” in a Greek tragedy, but an impressive effect was created by the emotive spectacle of the dance.

We tend to see the chorus as operating on the sidelines of the action, commenting (sometimes with banality) on the exchange between the actors, as at *Antigone* 724–5:

My lord, if he is saying something to the point, you should pay attention to him, and he to you, since good arguments have been made on both sides.

But later in *Antigone* (1099–1101) they take the unusual step of advising the main character on what to do:

Kreon: What then should I do? Tell me and I will do what you say.

Chorus: Go and let the maiden out of her cave-prison and prepare burial for the dead man lying out there.

Ironically Kreon performs these acts in the wrong order and thus brings about the final tragedies. In *Libation-Bearers* the chorus, again unusually, intervene in the action to prevent Aigisthos from bringing his body-guards with him (770–3). But in some plays they have a principal role, when it is their fate on which the action depends, as in Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* and *Eumenides* and in Euripides’ *Trojan Women*. In comedy the chorus is often antagonistic to the main character and especially in *Birds* will be openly hostile. On a couple of occasions the chorus must be converted as a result of the contest (*agōn*) and their sympathy and attitude change.

In an **episode** they will use the normal Attic (Athenian) dialect and their speech is no different from that of the actors. When they process into the *orchēstra*, often to the accompaniment of the **anapestic** meter (⊔ ⊔ –), again they chant in the usual Attic dialect. But when they perform a standing-song (*stasimon*) or engage in a lyric exchange with a character (*kommos*), their language switches to a quasi-Doric dialect, an artificial construct which would have sounded different to the audience. This has to do in part with the fact that the tradition of choral poetry is **Dorian** (certainly non-Attic), and thus it was perhaps expected that “song” should sound differently from “speech” (remember that the episodes were in verse, but **iambic** trimeter, according to Aristotle, is the closest rhythm to normal speech). Similarly the characters, when they engage in song with the chorus, with another actor, or on their own, sing in this artificial dialect. At *Alkestis* 244–6, part of a dialogue between

the dying Alkestis and her distraught husband in which she sings in Doric lyrics and he responds in less emotive (and Attic) iambics, Alkestis begins: *Hālie kai phaos hāmerās ouraniai te dinai nephelās dromaiou*, which in Attic should have run *Hēlie kai phōs hēmerās ouraniai te dinai nephelēs dromaiou*. Not a huge difference, and certainly understandable to the spectators, but carrying the flavor of the Doric dialect and the connotation of “song.”

Comic choruses sing less often in this artificial Doric, and when they do (as at *Birds* 1058–70), the effect is deliberately to evoke a higher style than the lower norm of comedy. Aristophanes can certainly write in the Doric style. The opening words of the Pindaric poet at *Birds* 904–6 belong to this lyric tradition, but here too the intent is parody of the loftier form. In the entry-songs of the chorus in *Clouds* (276–90, 299–313) the clouds do lapse into Doric on a couple of occasions.

The performers

The choristers were usually Athenian males, and those serving in a chorus were spared military service during the period of rehearsal. At the Lenaia metics could participate for that festival only. The competitions at the Dionysia would require ten men’s dithyrambic choruses of fifty each, three tragic choruses of twelve or fifteen each, and five comic choruses at twenty-four each. Add to this ten boys’ choruses again at fifty each, and we get a total of nearly 1100 performers, although one might consider the possibility that a dithyrambic performer might also appear in a dramatic chorus. We would like to know how large was the body of performers available. If the pool of performers were small, then the relationship between performer and spectator would be one of “us” and “them,” the former doing something that an “average” Athenian did not do. But if performing was something more widespread – just as most Welshmen, it seems, can sing – then spectators would be familiar with the experience and technique and perhaps be more drawn into the details of performance. Since choristers would have to perform in the three tragedies as well as play satyrs in the satyr-drama that followed, acting in tragedy would be a major undertaking and presumably carried more than a little prestige.

The chorus of tragedy was originally twelve in number – this is made clear at Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (1348–71) where the chorus disintegrates into twelve distinct individuals – and was allegedly increased to fifteen by Sophokles. However, a late-fifth-century inscription (*IG* i³ 969) from the Rural Dionysia at Anagyros records a *chorēgia* by a Sokrates (not the philosopher) and a victory by Euripides. A further fourteen *tragōidoi* (“performers in tragedy”) are then listed. This does not fit a chorus of fifteen, but can be explained if the *didaskalos* (Euripides) and two others performed as actors and the other twelve as choristers. Complicating the matter is the Pronomos Vase (see fig. 3.1) which shows only eleven choristers costumed as satyrs. Some ancient sources describe the chorus entering in three files, with the outside file, that closest to the spectators, regarded as the most important and its leader considered the chorus-leader. How the chorus performed in their standing-songs (*stasima*) is a matter of debate. They may have performed in three ranks facing out into the *theatron*; this

would suit production in theaters without the circular *orchēstra*. Possibly they danced in a ring around the *orchēstra*, much in the manner that Greeks dance in the round today. Supporting this interpretation is the nomenclature of the parts of a choral song: *strophē* and *antistrophē*, “turn” and “counter-turn,” and the origin of tragedy in the dithyramb or “circular choruses.” Perhaps an originally circular style of performance was augmented or superseded by other formations. Comedy required a larger chorus of twenty-four choristers, and thus would operate with twice the space and manpower, probably producing a more crowded and impressive, if less elegant, spectacle. In at least two comedies, and probably in many more, a pair of opposing half-choruses was employed: old men and old women in *Lysistrata*, rich and poor men in Eupolis’ *Marikas*. In both plays we know that the chorus divided and came together again as they play progressed.

Actors were assigned in some way to the productions, perhaps by lot, perhaps by the choice of the *chorēgos* or the poet. It would be revealing to know how much choice the poet had in his actors. Ancient sources suggest that originally the poet played the lead role in his drama and that Sophokles, having a weak voice, was the first to abandon the acting role. More than one scholar has suggested that Aristophanes himself played the lead role in *Acharnians*, where the personae of the comic poet and his chief character merge at least twice – and also in *Wasps* where Bdelykleon seems to speak for Aristophanes at lines 650–1. It would be appropriate for Aristophanes to play a character called “Loathe-Kleon.”

While some of Aeschylus’ early plays can be performed with two actors, three speaking actors were the norm in classical tragedy. A case can be made for the same number in comedy, although some scenes would make considerable demands on a third actor, involving rapid changes of costume and swift exit through one *eisodos* to return by a different entrance. There are a couple of places in Aristophanes where four speaking actors seem to be required, but in one of these (the scene of decision in *Frogs*) the text is confused because of revision. The extant remains of Menander do not require more than three actors at any point.

Actors’ dress and costume varied widely among the three dramatic genres. Unlike comedy and satyr-drama, we do not have many visual representations of a tragic performer. For the fifth-century two vases now in Boston and Ferrara show tragic performers dressing for their roles (fig. 1.10; see cover figure), while a fragment of a vase from Taras splendidly illustrates the dress and mask of a tragic actor in the fourth century (fig. 1.11). Many vases are clearly influenced by tragedy, but these do not show masked or costumed actors or a performance in any sense. They give us a tragic scene, sometimes a collage of scenes, but with the conventional dress (or lack of it) of Greek heroic art. The Pronomos Vase (see fig. 3.1) shows actors in a satyr-drama, but these plays were the coda to a tragic production and performed by the tragic actors and chorus. Both these actors and the Aigisthos-figure on the *Chorēgoi* Vase (see fig. 4.2) are costumed in the grand style. The masks were life-like, the costumes rich and flowing. The effect was to reinforce the serious and elevated nature of the genre. In the satyr-drama, while the satyrs (see fig. 3.2) wore very little, a mask with an ugly satyric face and a pair of briefs with a small erection, the actors continued to wear the more serious costume of tragedy. Comedy was meant to depict the ridiculous



Figure 1.10 *Tragic performers dressing for their role as maenads, on a red-figure pelike, ca. 430. Reproduced courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Henry Lillie Fund. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*

(*geloion*), and to that end its actors wore grotesque masks, padded costumes, and a dangling *phallos* (see chapter 4).

Prizes were awarded for the first actor, first in tragedy and later in comedy. By the fourth century lead actors had become internationally known “stars,” and by the Dionysia of 340 lead actors would be shared by the tragic poets in order presumably to provide a level playing-field. In the fifth century actors would play for one poet only, and it has been suggested that the lead actor might play as many parts as possible in order to increase his visibility. This seems doubtful, as with a few exceptions roles belonged to the same actor throughout the play – the principal exception being *Oedipus at Kolonos*, where all three actors have to play Theseus in order for the drama to work with three actors. In *Libation-Bearers* the same actor plays Elektra, the Nurse, the effeminate Aigisthos, and Klytaimestra, showing that in 458 Aeschylus had an actor who excelled at female roles. Sometimes an actor will take on two significant roles in a play, as in *Trachinian Women*, where the lead actor will play first the weak Deianeira and then her brutal husband, Herakles, and in *Ajax* where the lead actor plays first Ajax and then his brother. In Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* an actor’s roles



Figure 1.11 Costumed actor holding his mask. Apulian Gnathia fragment, attributed to the Konnakis Painter, ca. 350. © Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg. Photo: P. Neckermann.

between plays can be significant: the actor who plays Pylades, the mouthpiece of Apollo at *Libation-Bearers* 900–2, will play Apollo in the next drama, while the actor playing the masculine Klytaimestra will become Athene (“I am always for the male”).

Both tragedy and comedy could use other players, *kōpha prosōpa* (“silent faces”) in all sorts of supporting roles: guards, attendants, kitchen utensils (in *Wasps*), children. Sometimes the extra characters seem to speak, but it is more likely that their brief expressions were spoken by one of the three canonical actors, who after all were masked and would not be seen obviously talking – the barbarian god in *Birds*, the Persian envoy in *Acharnians*, the son of Admetos in *Alkestis*. In Aristophanes’ *Peace* a large statue of that goddess is hauled out from the *skēnē*-building. Comedy builds a nice bit of self-reference as Hermes undertakes to speak for the inanimate figure (657–63):

Trygaios: But tell me, my lady, why are you silent?

Hermes: She will not talk to the spectators, since she is very angry at them for what she has suffered.

Trygaios: Let her talk a little with you then.

Hermes: Tell me, my dear, what you have in mind for them. Go on, you who of all females hate shields the most. I'm listening. That's what you want? Okay.

The judgment scene of **Kratinos'** lost *Dionysalexandros* could require as many as five speaking characters (Dionysos-Alexandros, Hermes, and three goddesses), and if we suppose that each goddess spoke for herself, we would need three separate scenes, the third actor taking the role of each goddess in turn. But all other ancient allusions to the Judgment of Paris show the three goddesses together as a group. Clearly the easiest way to stage this scene is to have Hermes speak for each goddess in turn, although perhaps Aphrodite, the eventual victor, spoke to Dionysos-Alexandros in her own voice. There are also secondary choruses: of Athenians at the end of *Eumenides*, again twelve to match the twelve Furies; of huntsmen in *Hippolytos*, who have their own song at 61–71 and then sing with the regular chorus at 1102–50; of boys in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* and also in *Wasps*.

Accompanying the chorus was an *aulētēs*, often inaccurately described as a “flute-player,” since an *aulos* was a reed instrument, played by blowing into it, rather than across the mouthpiece. Visual representations show the *aulētēs* playing a double-reed instrument, with pipes of varying lengths. Rather than a flute, imagine a double oboe or double recorder, supported by a mouth- and cheek-piece and fastened by two straps around the head. The *aulētēs* wore splendid robes with elaborate decoration – witness the figure of Pronomos, who occupies the prime position on the Pronomos Vase (see fig. 3.1), more so than the poet himself who sits apart in a less prominent position, or the splendid striding figure on a red-figure *kratēr* in Sydney (fig. 1.12). The *aulētēs* would accompany the choral sections of tragedy, comedy, and satyr-drama and would provide the music for the dithyrambic choruses, as well as leading them into the performance space. At *Birds* 859–61 it appears that the *aulos*-player in that comedy was dressed as a bird, at least for the second half of the play:

You, stop playing. By Herakles, what is this? I have seen many strange things in my day, but I've never seen a crow wearing a mouthpiece.

The *aulos* possessed an ambiguous role in classical Athens. An *aulos*-player was a frequent presence in the parties and celebrations throughout the city. In one sense it was something to be officially disapproved of, since a popular myth told of Athene's rejection of the *aulos* because it disfigured her face as she blew into it. On the other hand a splendidly dressed *aulos*-player is portrayed on vases depicting performances of various kinds. Thus the *aulos* was the essential symbol of a formal performance in ancient Athens, and the splendid outfit might suggest that this disreputable character is on his best behavior when performing on a civic occasion. The modern equivalent of the *aulos* might be the guitar, the universal symbol of popular counter-culture, but also no stranger to a classical music concert.



Figure 1.12 Aulos-player, fragment of a red-figure skyphoid, attributed to the Palermo Painter, ca. 400. Reproduced courtesy of the Nicholson Museum, Sydney.

There are occasions where the spectators themselves become participants in the drama. This would not be at all unusual for comedy in view of its notoriously anti-illusionary approach. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* (274–6) Dionysos wonders where the “murderers and liars” are, whom Herakles said he would encounter in the underworld. We do not have the stage directions, but Xanthias must turn him to face the *theatron*:

Xanthias: Are you sure you don't see them?

Dionysos: By Poseidon, yes I do, I see them now.

At the conclusion of the *agōn* in *Clouds* (1088–1104) the inferior argument wins his case by demonstrating that legal experts, tragic poets, and popular politicians are “assholes”:

Inferior Argument: Look at the spectators and see who are in the majority.

Superior Argument: I'm looking.

Inferior Argument: And what do you see?

Superior Argument: By god, the assholes are everywhere.

There are places where the spectators are worked more largely into the drama. When Dikaiopolis pleads his case in *Acharnians* (496–556) he is doing far more than appeal to the hostile chorus, he becomes Aristophanes making a point to the larger *theatron*. In fact he begins by altering a line from Euripides to “do not be angry with me, men of the *theatron*.”

The spectators may also be brought into the drama in tragedy. In the opening scene of *Oedipus Tyrannos*, a priest appeals to Oedipus on behalf of his plague-struck people. These “children of Kadmos” are certainly the young suppliants who accompany the priest, but imagine that by the wave of the hand the Athenian spectators are brought into the drama. This could be breathtaking not just because the Athenians would be invited to become citizens of what was at the time an enemy city, but also because (if the play is correctly dated to the early 420s) Athenians were recovering from a plague of their own. At the end of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* a jury of twelve Athenians enters the *orchēstra* to decide the fate of Orestes. When the Furies abandon their anger and become Eumenides (“the kindly ones”), they are escorted to their new home beneath the Acropolis by the people of Athens. Could Aeschylus have resisted drawing the spectators into this installation? At the end of the National Theatre’s production of *Oresteia* in 1981, the audience was urged to “stand and be silent as the Kind Ones pass by.” Much of the dramatic impact of *Eumenides* lies in the resonance created as the action approached Athens of the dramatist’s own day.

Drama, Dionysos, and the *Polis*

One of the principal problems in the modern study of Greek drama is assessing the extent to which drama was a religious offering, an exploration of political identity, or an engaging piece of popular entertainment. It first should be noted that “religion” is not the best word to use when referring to the beliefs and worship of the ancient Greeks. To the modern ear the word suggests organized systems of formal rituals and creeds, a hierarchy of officials (“hierarchy” means literally “rule of the sacred”), or the sort of entry one checks off (or not) on a census form. In the ancient world the lines were not distinctly drawn between religion and philosophy or morality and ethics. Greeks worshipped their gods, not from any sense of personal guilt or fervent belief or in an attitude of humility, but because the gods of their myths represented forces beyond humanity in the universe, forces which had control over mortals, and which (it was felt) could be influenced by human worship and offerings. The principle of *dō ut dēs* (“I give so that you may give”) lay behind the offering of sacrifices to the gods. In Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* Agamemnon must give his daughter in sacrifice to Artemis so that he may get the winds that will take his army to Troy. This was a sacrifice accepted and the request answered, although with tragic results. We see the opposite at Sophokles’ *Oedipus Tyrannos* 911–23, where Jokaste enters with offerings for Apollo, the god of light and knowledge who operates behind the action of the play, and asks for a happy outcome for Oedipus and for the people of Thebes. This will be a sacrifice not accepted and a prayer unanswered.

At Athens dramatic competitions were staged at the festivals of Dionysos, particularly at the Lenaia in late January and the City Dionysia in late March or early April. Aristotle (*Poetics* 1449a10) tells us that tragedy developed “from those who led the dithyramb,” and as we know from a couplet from Archilochos (700–650 BC; F 120 West),

for I know how to lead Lord Dionysos' dithyramb
when my wits are thunder-blasted with wine,

that the dithyramb had associations with Dionysos, it has become traditional to seek the origins of tragedy in the rituals of Dionysos. The introduction of satyr-drama was connected by certain ancient sources with a saying, “nothing to do with Dionysos,” and explained by some as an attempt to retain the presence of Dionysos within drama. Aristophanes himself at *Frogs* 366 claims comedy as part of “the ancestral rites of Dionysos.” We may be uncertain how far to trust Aristotle or other later sources, but the fact remains that in the fifth and fourth centuries drama at Athens *was* performed as part of the festivals of Dionysos and in the fourth century actors described themselves as “artists of Dionysos.” A number of questions suggest themselves at this point:

- What sort of god was Dionysos and why was he the patron of drama?
- Did the writers, performers, and audience see themselves as engaging in a religious occasion?
- Were the ancient dramas (especially tragedy) equivalent to the mediaeval mystery plays?
- Do formal religious rituals underlie Greek drama in any way?
- Were these festivals the excuse for a popular entertainment that was essentially “secular,” in the way Christmas (properly the birth of Christ) has become the season for pantomimes and big box-office movies?
- Is the association with Dionysos just a coincidence of geography?
- Does Greek drama in fact have “anything to do with Dionysos”?

One's first reaction on hearing the name Dionysos, or even more so with “Bacchos,” one of his titles, is to imagine a god of wine and unrestrained revelry. In Mozart's opera, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Pedrillo and Osmin sing a boisterous drinking-song, “Vivat Bacchus! Bacchus lebe, der den Wein erfand!” (“Hail to Bacchos, long live Bacchos, Bacchos who discovered wine!”), which sums up well the prevalent modern conception of him. But Dionysos is far more than a god of wine and unrestrained celebration, he is an elemental force in human life. In *Bacchae* Teiresias considers him as the principle of the “wet,” as opposed to the “dry” of Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, and he is very much a god of the liquid life force, not just the grape and wine, but of all plants (his titles include *dendritēs*, “of trees,” and *anthios* “of flowers”) and of the life force of animals. He is a god of growth and of the power of youth.

He is also a notoriously difficult deity to appreciate fully. His name has been found on the Linear B tablets ca. 1300 BC, and Homer knows of his encounter with Lykourgos (*Iliad* 6.130–40). But he was always an outsider in the world of the Olympians.

In the standard version of his birth (related in Euripides' *Bacchae*), he was the child of a divine father, Zeus, and a mortal princess, Semele of Thebes, and such an offspring of divine and human is usually a human hero, such as Perseus or Helen or Herakles. But Dionysos was "twice-born." Semele was consumed by the thunder-bolt of Zeus and the fetus, taken at six months from his mother's womb, was placed in the thigh of Zeus and born three months later – compare the birth of Athene (associated with wisdom) from the head of Zeus and the birth of Dionysos (a god of growth) from his genital region. Fathered by and born from Zeus, Dionysos thus becomes a god himself, but his myths tell a repeated story of the need for acceptance. His existence was hidden from Zeus' jealous wife, Hera, who would eventually drive the young god mad and send him on wanderings far beyond the Greek world. In *Bacchae* he returns to Greece from the East, followed by his Eastern devotees, to win his place as an Olympian deity and to introduce his rites to humanity.

Although a traditional Greek god with an impeccable pedigree, he is almost always seen as a foreigner from the East. His name "Dionysos" seems to combine the Greek "Dio-" (the root of Zeus) and "-nysos," which may relate to the eastern mountain Nysa, of which his followers sing at *Bacchae* 556. The *thyrsos* has been connected with the Hittite word *tuwarsa* ("vine") and his other name, Bacchos, with a Lydian name *bakivali*. There was thus something different about Dionysos, which made him partly "unGreek."

He is often set against Apollo, most notably by Nietzsche in his antithesis of the Apollonian (order, structure, light, intellect) and the Dionysian (chaos, darkness, emotion), and is associated with disguise and transformation. Here is the god who breaks down boundaries (youth/age, male/female, human/animal, emotion/intellect), who confounds the norms, who in *Bacchae* drives women from the city to the mountain and brings his own wildness into the heart of the city. His associations are with the animal – the possessed Pentheus in *Bacchae* sees Dionysos as a bull and he is frequently shown on art with the panther or leopard. Those who encounter and resist Dionysos can find themselves transformed into animal guise. His followers are the maenads ("the mad women"), who dress in fawn-skins and carry the *thyrsos* (a branch tipped with ivy), and the male satyrs, half-human and half-animal, creatures that are both more and less than human. In their wilder celebrations the worshippers of Dionysos ran berserk on the mountainside (*oreibasia*), filled with wine and the intoxication of the group experience, catching and rending their prey (*sparagmos*) and eating the raw flesh (*ōmophagia*). In *Bacchae* the messenger describes the women on the mountain, in harmony with and in control of nature. They nurse the young of wild animals, and with their *thyrsos* produce milk and honey from the earth.

The myths about Dionysos reveal an interesting tension. Some show his power and devastating treatment of those who reject his worship. Pentheus at Thebes is the best-known example (Euripides' *Bacchae*), while Aeschylus wrote a tetralogy about Lykourgos of Thrace, who also opposed Dionysos and was destroyed. The daughters of Minyas in Orchomenos and of Proteus in Argos refused to accept the rites of Dionysos and were punished with madness, made to kill their own children, and transformed into animals. The *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos* tells how pirates attempted to kidnap the god, thinking him a prince worthy of ransom, and how the god caused

vines to cover the ship and turned the sailors into dolphins. In one story the vine (*ampelos*) gets its name from Ampelos, a beautiful youth and beloved of the god, who died accidentally at Dionysos' hands, and from the god's tears falling on the boy's body grew the first vines and grapes. His followers were the maenads, the "mad women," and his cult the antithesis to the organized city and the rational order of the mind, two of the stereotypes that we associate with the ancient Greeks. Perhaps that is why he was an outsider to the usual Greek way of looking at the world; he represented emotion and instinct as against intellect and ordered behavior.

But for all these tales of destruction, Dionysos promises blessings to his followers: not just wine – Dionysos is far more than "jolly Bacchos" – but release from toil and the structures of daily routine, from the miseries of age and responsibility. The chorus in *Bacchae* sings (417–23):

This god, the son of Zeus, rejoices in festivities, and is friends with Peace, the goddess that bestows wealth and raises boys to men. To rich and poor alike he has given an equal share of the delight from wine that banishes pain.

He is associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and as the messenger in *Bacchae* puts it, "without wine there is no Love nor anything pleasant for men" (773–4). His myths may involve the death of his victims, but he did bring his mother Semele back from the dead and install her as a goddess among the Olympians. Hermes may cross the boundary between life and death, when he escorts the dead to the underworld, but only Dionysos can dissolve that boundary.

An alternative version of the birth of Dionysos makes him "twice-born" in quite a different sense. Born of Zeus and Persephone (queen of the Underworld), he was to be the god to succeed Zeus and unite the upper celestial world of light and life with the lower world of death and darkness. Zeus' ever-jealous wife, Hera, incited the Titans to tear Dionysos to pieces and devour his flesh. Athene saved the heart and gave it to Zeus, who swallowed it, thereby taking the essence of Dionysos into himself. He subsequently made Semele pregnant with Dionysos and the story of his birth continued as we know it. The Titans were destroyed by the fire-bolts of Zeus, and from their ashes came the race of human beings, possessing both the rebellious spirit of the Titans and the godhood of Dionysos. This was the Dionysos of the Orphics, a cult like that of the Mother and Daughter at Eleusis, that promised its followers "salvation" in the next world, through initiation in this world as well as a moral life. The chorus of initiates in *Frogs* may well be devotees of this cult of Dionysos. He is often seen as the Greek equivalent of the youthful consort of the Eastern Mother-Goddess (Adonis or Tammuz), whose death and rebirth both explains and enables the yearly cycle of agricultural fertility.

In his wild rituals worshippers would lose their own identity, become possessed by the deity they worshipped, and thus achieve a sort of group communion with one another. But here lies the dangerous side of Dionysos, for he is essentially hostile to the concept of the individual and conducive of the collective. Although for early Christians Dionysos was a dangerous pagan god, the parallels between his mythology and the experience of the early church are striking. Both Dionysos and Christ were

born of the Sky-Father god and a human woman; each experienced a marvelous birth; each died and returned to life; through the eating of flesh and drinking of wine, the followers of each become *entheos* ("god within") and achieve a "communion" with each other; and the devotees of each are promised happiness in the next life, through initiation and by behaving in an ethically proper fashion in this life. Scenes from the myths of Dionysos appear on Christian sarcophagi, and in the Byzantine period an anonymous writer created a *Christus Patiens* ("The Suffering Christ"), by using extensive material from *Bacchae*, to the extent that we can restore part of the missing scene at the end of *Bacchae* from the *Christus Patiens*. Not without cause has Christ been spoken of as "Dionysus' successor."

So this was the god who is depicted in art as presiding over the dramatic festival. But the questions posed above remain. Put generally, was the experience in the theater perceived by the performers and spectators as a "religious" experience? When the actors called themselves "artists of Dionysos," did they see themselves as conscious devotees like the maenads and the satyrs? In the front row of the stone theater at Athens are seats inscribed "of the priest of." Thus the priest of Dionysos had a front-row seat in the center of the *theatron* (see fig. 1.9) – at *Frogs* 297 the frightened character of Dionysos exclaims, "protect me, my priest, so I can have drink with you afterwards." The dramatic productions at the Lenaia festival fell into the jurisdiction of the archon *basileus*, who supervised the religious life of the state. When the chorus at *Frogs* 686 describes itself as a "holy band," it is speaking in more than its dramatic character as *mystai* (initiates), it is placing itself in the context of the religious occasion. The theater was situated above the sacred precinct of Dionysos, and his temple stood closely beside and behind the *skēnē*, in full view of the spectators in the *theatron*.

But few of the plots of tragedy have much to do with Dionysos. We have Euripides' *Bacchae* and know of other plays with this title, and Aeschylus' *Lykourgeia* will have dramatized Dionysos' encounter with Lykourgos in Thrace. But Dionysos seems to appear more often in comedy and satyr-drama than in tragedy, and while gods do appear on stage in Greek drama, the principal interest of the dramatists, especially Sophokles and Euripides, is with its human heroes, their sufferings and their place in the universe. Greek tragedy, indeed much of Greek myth, does not deal first and foremost with gods. Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (458 BC) and the Prometheus-plays attributed to Aeschylus are unusual in that gods dominate the action rather than humans. Taplin (1978: 162) declared decisively: "there is nothing intrinsically Dionysiac about Greek tragedy." In his view tragedy had passed from whatever initial connection it may have had with the god and his cult to a "political" (in the sense "of the *polis*") experience. People went to the theater as a communal activity and for an aesthetic entertainment, that in the case of tragedy raised "serious" (*spoudaios*) issues, but there was no longer any sense of the "religious" or the cultic about the event.

Critics were quick to respond, to insist upon an intrinsic connection between tragedy and the god. For Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988) Dionysos was the god who crosses the boundaries and confuses reality and illusion, who in his collective makes us lose our self-consciousness and identity of self. Tragedy is appropriately Dionysiac when we suspend our disbelief in watching the drama and enter a world of fiction and *mimēsis* (representation), a world presided over by the mask behind

which individual identity is hidden. Goldhill (1987) saw the essence of tragedy as political, as part of a civic discourse in the fifth century, where one's assumptions and ideas are challenged. What better patron, he argues, than the god of subversion himself? Seaford (1994), on the other hand, regarded Dionysos as essentially a democratic god, one who removes the barriers between city and country, between rich and poor, privileged and the ordinary citizens. In the collective of Dionysos, "all shall equal be." Many of the stories of tragedy depend on an opposition between the claims of the *oikos* ("house") and the claims of the *polis* ("city"). Great individuals may suffer or die (Oedipus or Pentheus) but the larger collective lives on, and in the case of Thebes in *Bacchae*, will be "saved" by Dionysos. Both tragedy and Dionysos are symbols or products of the Athenian democracy, and hence the performance of drama at the festival of this "democratic" deity.

On the other hand, we must reiterate that the plays as we have them have little to do with Dionysos. Scullion (2002) estimates that only about 4 percent of the plays we know about were concerned with Dionysos. He is not the god most often mentioned in the plays – that honor belongs to Zeus. Dionysos is at times invoked by the chorus in their songs, but so too are other gods. The evidence for dramatic production in other cities shows that drama was not exclusively performed under the patronage of Dionysos. The plays were part of the cult of Dionysos at Athens, but is the connection an intrinsic one? Masks are not unique to his cult – we know that heads of Dionysos were carried on a pole at the Lenaia, but there is no hint that these were meant to be worn. When the satyrs in Aeschylus' *Spectators* encounter life-like masks of themselves, they intend to hang them in the temple, not wear them. Tragedy may be "goat-song," but the goat is not in itself a Dionysiac creature. Goats were sacrificed to Apollo, the Muses, Pan, and Artemis. If we did not know that Greek drama (in particular, tragedy) was performed at the festivals of Dionysos, would we have been able to deduce that from the texts of the plays themselves? If the answer seems to be no, then perhaps we are forcing drama into a Dionysiac box.

Greek drama, especially Greek tragedy, is eminently emotional and entertaining. In a world of small cinemas and contained theaters, we cannot realize what the experience of the ancient outdoor civic theater was like. Aristotle states that the "end" of tragedy is to elicit pity and fear and to achieve a *katharsis* of these emotions, and an audience of several thousand people must have responded to a particularly effective drama (be it tragedy or comedy) with a collective and emotional response. But was that response one that they would have associated with Dionysos? One of the results of the worship of Dionysos was the achieving of ecstasy (in Greek, *ekstasis* or "standing out"), and some might assume that the aesthetic experience of attending the theater, suspending disbelief, and becoming involved in the sufferings of another was in some sense an *ekstasis*. But how different was this from listening to the epics about Odysseus and Achilles, which are certainly not Dionysiac?

The festival of Dionysos was the formal setting for drama, but is it a case of cause and effect? Scullion (2002) suggests that the theater was located near the temple of Dionysos by the accident of geography, that the natural place to locate a *theatron* was on the south-east slope of the Acropolis, in the area traditionally associated with the cult of Dionysos at Athens, and that this is all the connection there is. Perhaps when

the dramatic festivals were established or reformed ca. 500, or after the Persians had invaded and destroyed the city in 480, officials wanted to develop the part of the city on the other side from the *agora*. In the 440s Perikles had an *ōdeion* erected beside the theater, in fact intruding into it. Spectators entered the theater along the Street of the Tripods, the monuments erected by victorious dramatic *chorēgoi*. By this point that area is now a theater district, and we may want to stress that association rather than the presence of the temple of Dionysos. By the late fifth century, 100 years or so into the history of tragedy, perhaps one went to the theater to be entertained, to be part of the group experience, but not one that had much of the formally religious about it.

On the other side of the debate, we know that the Athenians had their own myth about Dionysos' arrival in their city, which was used to explain the dramatic choral performances in honor of the god. Like the others previously discussed, it involved an initial rejection of the god. But unlike the others, the punishment Dionysos inflicts on the city does not involve the removal of the womenfolk or the destruction of the ruling family; rather all the men in the city are afflicted by a disease of the genitals, collectively sharing in the suffering and humiliation that their rejection of the god has wrought. Seeking a cure, an oracle advises them to receive the god in every honorific way possible. On this advice they fashion *phalloi* and process the god into the heart of the city where he is fêted with sacrifice, song and dance. According to some, this reception ceremony for Dionysos and the earlier forms of song and dance associated with it are the forerunners of the entertainments performed during the City Dionysia. Thus, insofar as the yearly City Dionysia rehearsed the acceptance and establishment of Dionysos' cult at Athens, it was a commemorative, religious, and ritual celebration.

Greek drama was not a re-presentation or re-enactment of ritual in the strict sense of that term. The Cambridge anthropologists explained myth as developing out of ritual. We worship a certain way, do and say things in a certain ordered and repeated pattern, often for reasons unknown, and myths were invented to explain the details of that ritual. Beneath the form of a Greek tragedy Murray (1912) detected a supposed pattern of ritual of the "spirit of the year," a cycle of death and re-birth, where the death is a sacrificial death of the *pharmakos*, the scapegoat for whom "it is expedient that one man should die for the people." Characters such as Oedipus (*Oedipus at Kolonos*), Pentheus (*Bacchae*), Eteokles (*Seven*), do die at the end of their dramas, but that does not make them into the scapegoat of Greek society. In fact no play that we possess fits this theoretical model at all well. By its very nature ritual is performed in the same way again and again. What matters for tragedy in particular is the variation of the pattern, not the pattern itself. For comedy, Cornford (1934) replaced death in tragedy with a sacred fertility marriage, but although some comedies end with the marriage of the hero with a divine or quasi-divine being (Trygaios with Harvest-time in *Peace* and Peisetairos with Princess in *Birds*), that does not turn Aristophanes' extraordinarily witty and sophisticated political comedies into a fertility union.

Drama may certainly employ ritual, however, and recent criticism has concentrated on how various rituals, familiar to and taken for granted by the audience, impinge upon the drama and contribute to our understanding of them. Supplication, for example, or swearing an oath involved a formal process in Greek culture, and plays like Euripides' *Suppliant Women* and *Medea* exploit the spectators' familiarity with

these actions. Sophokles' *Ajax* turns on the themes of proper sacrifice and due burial. Plays often end with the establishment of a cult or ritual, such as the worship of Artemis near Athens (*Iphigeneia among the Taurians*) or the honors paid to the dead Hippolytos, and on a grander scale the worship of Dionysos himself (*Bacchae*), or that the Furies will be established beneath the Acropolis as Eumenides ("kind ones"). The dramatic impact gains when the modern reader comes to understand what the ancient spectator knew as part of his cultural heritage. For example, the choral ode at *Hippolytos* 1104–50 is unusual in that the principal chorus of serving-women sings with the subsidiary chorus of young huntsmen, first alternately and then perhaps together in the last *strophē*. This is a play very much about love and the relations between male and female, and this song may well relate to the ritual wedding-songs by men and women, ironic in that Hippolytos wants no part in Love, even more so in that Hippolytos will be posthumously honored by brides on their wedding eve. Antigone sees her fate of being walled up in a tomb as a marriage to Death, and her song with the chorus at 801–82 is full of the language and symbolism of marriage. In fact the fate of women in tragedy is frequently presented in terms of a marriage to death. Seaford (1987) has seen in the fate of Pentheus in *Bacchae*, who will find not new life and "salvation," but death, an inversion of the initiation-ritual of the devotee of Dionysos. Thus while Greek drama is not the playing out of the same basic ritual in different circumstances, the dramatists can exploit familiar rituals for effect. In *Wasps* we have the comic spectacle of the generations reversed, the conservative son trying to control and educate his willful father. Here the details of the Athenian rite of passage, the *ephēbeia*, would have illuminated the humor of that play. In passing, one should note that a sacrifice is never performed on stage. Aristophanes makes good comedy out of preparing and then delaying the ritual sacrifice in both *Peace* and *Birds*, with the exasperated hero doing the job off stage.

Dionysos himself is a character in Greek drama, but as we have pointed out above, not all that common in tragedy. Perhaps there were not all that many myths about Dionysos that could become good drama. Early Greek myth was an incredibly fertile source of stories about all sorts of heroes. Homer had made the Greek war against Troy part of the common heritage of Greece; other song cycles had related the troubles at Thebes, the early history of Athens, and the boar-hunt at Kalydon. A good dramatist and an eager audience will have expected tragedy to do more than relate the adventures of Dionysos, which could have had a monotonous pattern: the advent of the god, rejection by others, and the god's eventual triumph and reception. Of the thirty genuine tragedies that we possess from the fifth century, only one (Euripides' *Bacchae*) has anything to do with Dionysos. Two lost presentations by Aeschylus did dramatize two separate incidents in Dionysos' career (a possible trilogy set at Thebes and the *Lykourgeia*), but we do not have any hints of a dramatic treatment of the story of the daughters of Minyas or the death of Ikarios, both of whom encountered Dionysos with appropriately tragic results.

Dionysos is more at home in satyr-drama and in comedy. The satyrs are his followers, and in the first and last lines of Euripides' *Cyclops* they invoke Dionysos under his title *Bromios* ("the roaring one"). He was a character in Aeschylus' *Spectators*, berating his satyrs for abandoning his service for the life of an athlete (F 78a):

no-one, young or old, can resist the appeal of my dances in double rows,
but you lot want to be an Isthmian athlete, and crowned with boughs of pine
you pay no honour to the ivy.

He must have been a character in Sophokles' *Young Dionysos*, where the discovery of wine was dramatized, and in Achaïos' *Hephaistos* he facilitated the return of Hephaistos to Olympos. Again the sensual delights of Dionysos are presented to Hephaistos (F 17):

Dionysos: First we will delight you with dinner – and here it is!
Hephaistos: And then how will you bewitch me?
Dionysos: I shall anoint your entire body with fair-smelling perfume.
Hephaistos: Won't you first give me water to wash my hands?
Dionysos: Oh yes, as the table is being removed.

But it is in comedy that Dionysos appears most often, and he does so, in Sommerstein's apt phrase, in the role of "Dionysos as anti-hero." Comedy felt free to make fun of its gods, even (especially) the deity for whom it was being produced. Comedians would put Dionysos in the most unlikely situation possible and then watch the fun emerge as this essentially unheroic and pleasure-loving god tried to react to his situation. Two slaves at *Frogs* 740 describe Dionysos well:

Slave: Your master is a very noble fellow.
Xanthias: Of course he is – all he knows is drinking and fucking.

This last carries in the Greek a neat aural ring of *pinein* and *binein*. In Kratinos' mythical burlesque, *Dionysalexandros* (437?), Dionysos fills in for Alexandros (Paris) to judge the famous beauty-contest of the goddesses. It is he that wins Helen and a thousand ships of very angry Greeks. At the end of the comedy the real Alexandros keeps Helen and hands Dionysos over to the mercies of the Greeks. In Aristophanes' *Babylonians* (426), Dionysos arrives in Athens with his Eastern followers and encounters for the first time a demagogue, who extorts money from him and threatens legal action. In Eupolis' *Officers* (415?), Dionysos joins the Athenian navy and is taught the arts of war by the admiral Phormion. The fragments show us the effete and ineffectual Dionysos trying to adapt to the rigors of army life. In *Frogs* (405) he disguises himself as Herakles for his descent to the underworld to bring back Euripides.

Disguise and confusion of identity seem to be very much part of the dramatic *persona* of Dionysos. One of the boundaries that he dissolves is that of gender. In Aeschylus' *Edonians* Lykourgos is puzzled by this figure which appears to be both male and female. In *Bacchae* Pentheus is both confused and attracted by the delicate hair and smooth white skin of the "priest," who is Dionysos in disguise. In Eupolis' *Officers* someone mistakes Dionysos for a "she" and threatens to sell "her" as soon as possible. In Kratinos' *Dionysalexandros* he appears as Paris, either in the guise of a Trojan prince or more likely as a country shepherd, and we are told that the chorus of satyrs laugh and jeer at him. In *Frogs* (38–47) Herakles breaks out laughing at the sight of Dionysos in his usual saffron robe, covered by a lion-skin, wearing soft boots and carrying a

club. Later in the comedy (298–300) his slave calls him first “Herakles” – “don’t call me that or use that name” – and then “Dionysos” – “that’s even worse.” Dressing Dionysos in disguise and then penetrating that disguise was part of his role in drama.

Drama then does have a religious dimension. Plays were produced as part of the festivals in honor of Dionysos, when the normal life of the city stopped and the atmosphere of carnival took over. Centuries later, Plutarch records an anecdote about Sokrates’ reply to a question about whether he was worried about comedy’s unfair caricature of him (*On the Education of Children* 10c–d):

When Aristophanes produced his *Clouds* and piled abuse of every kind on him, one of those present said, “Aren’t you angry, Sokrates, for making fun of you in that way?” “Hardly,” replied Sokrates, “for in the theater I am made fun of as if I were at a great party.”

Lucian (*Fisherman* 14) has Philosophy demonstrate to her devotees that she at least can take a joke:

You got hot and bothered because someone was being rude to you? And yet you know that although Comedy treats me badly at the Dionysia, I still consider her a close friend. I’ve never taken her to court or even had a word of private complaint to her. I just let her make her usual jokes that belong to the festival. For I know that no harm can come from a joke.

At various places in the plays the gods and rituals of fifth-century Athens can be seen behind and beneath the texts, and one of the great issues of tragedy is the relationship between humans and gods. But Greek drama, like Greek myth in general, is more about human men and women. Gods do appear on stage, do intervene and influence the action, interact (often violently) with the human characters, but what interests the playwrights (particularly Euripides) is human behavior and human reaction. What do humans believe and expect from their gods? How do these gods live up to human expectations? Does a divine force or entity really behave in the very anthropomorphic manner that traditional myth (especially Homer) depicts them? Gods are immortal, gods have power, gods exist and are responsible in some way for the ways of the world. Greek tragedy sets out before its spectators instances of this interaction, not with the purpose of providing comforting answers, but of raising uncomfortable questions. Perhaps, after all, a festival honoring an ambiguous and discomfiting deity was not a bad place to attempt to explore the meaning of life, and more specifically, to assess how one might live a good or even the best life.

Drama and the polis

In most Greek cities citizens would readily accept that participation in their city’s religious festivals was an essential part of their civic duty. At the City Dionysia all legal and administrative business in the city ceased, at least for the opening day’s activities, to permit all citizens to attend the celebration. Later we have evidence

indicating that even prisoners were given something like our modern “day-pass” so that they too could join in the festivities. By the fourth century the Theoric Fund had been established to pay the cost of attendance for those who could not afford the expense. Clearly it was deemed of great importance that all citizens be released from competing commitments in order to venerate the god. Since all religious festivals were to some degree directed toward the protection and prosperity of their participants, they all might be said to serve political ends in the broadest sense of that term, especially when those festivals were community-wide. Thus the two Dionysiac festivals at Athens at which drama was produced can be said to serve both religious and political purposes. But much recent scholarship assumes an intensely close relationship between drama and the Athenian *polis*, especially the democratic *polis*.

This inevitably raises the question of drama’s relationship to *ta politika* (“the affairs of the *polis*”): its laws, its political identity and ideology. Was drama “political,” that is, “about the *polis*”? Did it contribute to the creation of an Athenian identity, or help to define what it meant to be an Athenian *politēs* (“citizen”)? Was drama a form of mass education, a vehicle for the instruction of the citizens in matters of “good” and “bad” citizenship? Or was it a vehicle for the airing of concerns that could not be given expression in other public forums? The answers to these questions are not mutually exclusive, for drama can speak to its spectators on several levels simultaneously. But to address the issues raised by these questions we need to view the institutionalization of drama from two perspectives, the context of its performance and the content of the plays, for each may be politicized in different ways.

Whether the dramatic competitions at the City Dionysia were established by Peisistratos in the 530s or in the aftermath of the Kleisthenic reforms ca. 501, we can say that they came into being through the sanction of Athens’ political leadership. The establishment of a new festival could have served to increase the ruler’s popularity among the citizen population, making it a good political move of benefit to all. The very name of festival was also strongly political. Whether the Dionysia was referred to as the “Great” or the “City,” such a name speaks not only of the grandeur of the event but also of the grandeur of the *polis* capable of sponsoring it.

The City Dionysia’s “political” connections are further seen in the nature of the figure who would govern its annual production. The competitions were not supervised by the archon *basileus*, the man traditionally in charge of the religious celebrations in the city, but rather by the archon *eponymous*. This was the magistrate after whom the year was named (“in the archonship of . . .”) and was selected from among eligible Athenian citizens of the upper property classes, who traditionally had charge of civic affairs. That the administration of the City Dionysia should have been granted to the chief civic magistrate clearly locates the festival in a political context.

It may also seem that the timing of the festival was set with the interests of the *polis* in view. By late March the sea lanes had once again opened for the sailing season, permitting the tyrant as well as other prosperous Athenian families to play host to many visiting dignitaries and aristocratic friends from overseas, showcasing their city, promoting its cultural advances and advantages, and perhaps using the occasion to establish potentially lucrative trading connections and alliances for themselves and the city.

Unfortunately we are poorly informed about the way the festival was conducted from the time of its inauguration until the mid fifth century. However, we do know that towards the end of the sixth century, the City Dionysia was re-organized so that the tragic playwrights were now required to produce three tragedies *and* a satyr-drama, apparently (according to one source) because by that time the dramas produced at the festival had “nothing to do with Dionysos.” Thus if the god were not being properly honored at his own festival, this might have serious negative repercussions for the well-being of the *polis*. The Athenians may have felt themselves particularly vulnerable at this time in their history when the city had just recently overthrown the tyranny and taken its first tentative steps along the road to a democratic government. At the same time, the introduction of a new dramatic genre to the City Dionysia, one that self-consciously made fun out of the traditional heroic values and stories just as Athens was permitting more of its citizen-male populace to participate actively in its political institutions, suggests that the festival’s re-organization was also undertaken to reflect the new political freedoms enjoyed by the *polis*. So the Dionysia both protects and celebrates the city through its control of the medium of drama.

More clearly reflective of “political things” are the organization of the festival and the events which took place in the opening days of the competition. First of all, the funding of the festival’s choral performances and feasts, which had formerly been in the hands of the city’s wealthiest citizen(s), was partially taken over by the city treasury, which assumed the expenses for the sacrifices on the 8th and 9th of Elaphebolion. The archon then appointed a *chorēgos*, a prosperous citizen responsible for the expenses involved in bringing the playwright’s dramas to public performance, to each playwright to whom he had “granted a chorus.” This change converted a previous act of magnanimous personal generosity into an expenditure considered to be an integral part of his duty to the *polis*, as important as funding the construction of a warship or providing for the provisioning of its crew for one year, and equally, if not more, costly. If his playwright won the competition, the city permitted the *chorēgos* to erect a monument to his victory, usually along the road leading into the theater. The city was thus creating a secondary competition amongst its wealthiest citizens in a contest for public honor and recognition. But whether this man funded the winning playwright or not, if he was (or had aspirations to become) a political leader, his expenditures on the dramatic competitions could be cited with pride as proof of his commitment to the *polis* and of his standing as a good citizen. This is certainly the case with the speakers of Antiphon I.β (410s) and Lysias 21 (390s).

One such position of leadership was that of general (*stratēgos*), which in the 480s became an elective office and replaced that of the archons in political power and prestige. Athens elected ten such figures annually from a list of such eligible citizens. Plutarch (*Kimōn* 8.7–9) records that in the year 468, when these generals entered the theater to pour the ritual libations that opened the competition, it was decided that they should remain in the theater to serve as judges for that year’s dramatic contests. Normally the judges were selected by lottery, again from a group of eligible citizens, one from each of the ten tribes into which Kleisthenes had divided the people of Attica at the time of his reforms. The generals too were elected according to the same distribution, usually one from each tribe, so this last-minute change in the usual

procedures would not adversely affect the equality of representation among the tribal groups.

This account belongs to the late first century AD and may seem to some a romantic fiction, but if true, it is very suggestive of the way in which this first day of the festival was being politicized. Plutarch notes that because that year's competitors had generated an especially high level of rivalry "among the spectators" (it was Sophokles' first appearance at the Dionysia), the archon determined to make the outcome even more significant by having men of such dignity determine the results. This same passage is our source for the information that the generals regularly poured the opening libations. But why should Athens' foremost military leaders be deemed the appropriate figures to open a dramatic competition by regularly performing this service? The answer would seem to rest in the understanding shared by the Athenians of the relationship between contests of words and contests of war. The generals exemplified (in theory, if not always in practice) the ideal citizen male, a man gifted in the arts of deliberation and excelling in the arts of war, a ready defender of the city in word and action. Having the generals offer the libation to Dionysos Eleuthereus ("freer") carried two messages simultaneously. For the citizens, it reminded them of their present freedoms as well as their obligations to the *polis* as citizens to rise to its defense. It also demonstrated to visitors that Athenians lived in a *polis* that valued its freedoms, one which had sacrificed much to win freedom for others, and one still ready and able to defend itself and others against any who would impose their rule upon it.

Three other notable events were included in the opening ceremonies at various points in the fifth century. First, the levies (*phoros*) that Athens had collected for the support of the Delian League (later the Athenian "Empire") were paraded into the theater, talent by talent. This overt display of the annual *phoros* would remind citizen and visitor alike of Athens' military prowess and its glory as the *polis* most responsible for the defeat of the Persian invasion. This was both a point of pride for the city and justification for its leadership of the Delian League. Following this public display of Athenian glory was the announcement of the names and the special honors granted to citizens and to foreign friends of the city, who had provided exemplary service to the Athenian *polis* over the past year. This is first attested for the year 410/9. Then came the parading of the city's war orphans in full military panoply provided by the city, young men whose fathers had died while on military service, who had been raised to maturity from the public purse. These war orphans conveyed a strong political message to the spectator: Athens is a *polis* of military might, a people who value service to the city and who are prepared to raise up the next generation of warriors who will, in their turn, fight to protect it. Taken in conjunction with the use of the ten generals to pour the ritual libations, these preliminary displays of wealth, exemplary service, and military prowess would have served to remind all present that Athens, like her festival, was "Great."

Thus much of what transpired at the preliminary ceremonies at the City Dionysia was designed to display the best of the city to the city and its guests. The *polis* made use of this festival to represent itself in a particular way, as a *polis* with a glorious past and a present equally worthy of renown. So a festival which, according to some, seems to have been instituted partly to celebrate the "freeing" of Eleutherai from Boiotia

was first reinterpreted and restructured as a celebration of Athens' own freedom from tyranny. By the time we get a reasonably clear view of the festival's full organization in the second half of the fifth century, the freedom now celebrated has become international in scope, for the Athenian *polis* styled itself as the liberator of Greece from foreign oppression. Seen from this viewpoint, the context of drama at the City Dionysia has become highly politicized.

To this point our attention has been focused on City Dionysia, primarily because it was the first and most important dramatic competition established by the Athenian *polis*. A second reason for this focus is quite simply the comparative lack of evidence for the companion dramatic festival, the Lenaia. The festival itself is one of great antiquity, organized under the administration of the archon *basileus*, the traditional religious magistrate. But it would seem that its activities were not politicized to the same degree as the Great Dionysia until the 440s when it became a recognized competitive venue, first for comedies and then for tragedies.

It is quite possible that the presentation of humorous and insulting impromptu skits had long been a part of this festival. Being able to laugh at oneself and at others with others is a liberating and unifying experience. During this period of "sacred time," when social niceties could be laid aside and the traditional deference for one's social superiors ignored, tensions among and between the city's residents could be alleviated through their airing in ritualized and controllable ways. Thus an event at which the city's residents were permitted to let off steam in the form of insults actually worked to ensure the relative stability of the city. This returns us to the idea that community-wide religious festivals contribute to the preservation and prosperity of the *polis*, first by venerating a god who might otherwise withdraw his benefits from the community, and second by bringing the community together in a "sacred time" during which they can re-affirm their collective identity, even if, as at the Lenaia, this meant laughing at themselves. However, it was only when the city granted the Lenaia the status of a competition, awarded prizes and kept a record of the yearly winners that we can speak of its relationship to the politics of the Athenian *polis* in the same way as we have done for the Dionysia.

Partly because it fell within the winter months, the Lenaia remained a festival that fewer outsiders attended. Things said and done at this contest were apparently only for the eyes and ears of residents of the town of Athens. It differed markedly from the City Dionysia in that metics (resident aliens with limited rights and obligations in the city) were allowed to participate both as choral performers and as *chorēgoi*. Granting this right seems to have satisfied three needs of importance to the *polis*. First, by including this marginalized group as active participants in a city-wide celebration of Dionysos, the city gave appropriate honor to the god of communal celebration. Second, it gave a potentially troublesome group of outsiders within the city a sense of belonging denied them in other areas and so reduced the threat that dissatisfaction among them might cause to the city's stability. Aristophanes with magnanimity (and some condescension) pronounces (*Acharnians* 504–8):

The contest is that at the Lenaia, and foreigners are not yet here. The tribute is not coming in, nor allies from the cities. We are here by ourselves, clean-hulled (so to speak), for I consider the metics to be the bran of our population.

Third, it served to reinforce the Athenians' view of themselves as an open and inclusive society. So while the Lenaia had already served some important needs of the *polis* before becoming a competitive venue, after the contests for comedy had been granted civic recognition, it became possible for some metics to aspire to win a share in the renown for service to the *polis* that was formerly available only to full citizens. In this context, the Lenaia too was politicized.

In terms of the differences in the context of dramatic productions between these two festivals, we may make the following observations. Both venues were used by the city of Athens as a *polis* to promote Athenian identity, political unity, and shared ideals about citizenship. However, the City Dionysia, by the mid fifth century, if not sooner, was used to showcase Athens' superiority as a *polis* to all, as a center for the arts, as a military might, and as a beneficent world leader. The Lenaia, by contrast, was more inward-focused, more concerned with maintaining the unity and stability of the *polis*, which was then showcased to the world at the City Dionysia.

Drama's political content

Scholars generally agree on the political nature of the City Dionysia's opening day ceremonies. What remains to consider is the degree to which the content of the plays performed at this festival was politicized. The evidence can be assessed along two somewhat different lines: the degree to which tragedy and comedy engage with current political issues, and the degree to which the dramas intentionally reflect the socio-political institutions of the *polis*.

For Old Comedy there can be little argument that its content is both topical and political. Not restricted to known myths, story-lines and characters, comic drama was free to present a humorous look at issues of current interest to the *polis* as well as to shape its characters around well- and lesser-known persons in the Athenian political arena, if it wished to do so. Many did so choose, especially in the latter part of the fifth century. In the extant plays of Aristophanes we encounter the names of politicians, philosophers, businessmen, and other poets. Some are applauded for their contribution to the *polis*, but most become the butt of jokes aimed at various aspects of their personal and public lives and especially at their policies. Kleon, the demagogue, who succeeded Perikles in the leadership of the Athenians, is a favorite target of Aristophanes. But he is in good company with other famous names such as Perikles, Euripides, Aeschylus, and Sokrates. At the heart of much of this ridicule is a perceived failure on the part of the named figure to serve the *polis*, to behave like a good citizen. For instance, a politician named Kleonymos is called a coward for allegedly throwing his shield away in battle, and thus as one who has failed in his duty to defend the city. Euripides and Sokrates are presented as men who encourage the undermining of civic values, and thus as failing in their obligation to the city to set good examples for the youths or to be good teachers. In the 420s the strongest critique is reserved for Kleon whose activities as the "leader of the people" are reinterpreted as vulgar and self-serving. He exploits the jury system to indict his political opponents, using jury-pay to keep the jurors "in his back pocket" (*Wasps*); he is a corrupt overseer of the Athenian civic household, bent on personal gain at the people's expense (*Knights*).

When Kleon died in 422/1, others popular leaders like Hyperbolos and Kleophon become the targets of Aristophanes' humor. But there would also seem to be a strong critique of the current state of the city's institutions, policies and citizenry, of the injustices that the system permits and that the people tolerate or even bring upon themselves.

The topicality of tragedy is far less easy to determine, although some tragic dramas have been viewed as more transparently topical, or as containing sections that make topical allusions, despite the fact that the dramas are ostensibly set in the distant past. In the early days of the fifth century, it was even acceptable to make recent history the subject of tragedy, as in Aeschylus' *Persians* (472), which describes the victory in 480 of Athens and her allies over the Persians from the Persian perspective. We also hear, however, that when Phrynichos (career: 510–470) decided to stage an historical tragedy entitled *The Capture of Miletos* (493 or 492), based on the fall of Miletos to the Persians in 494, he was assessed a heavy fine and this subject forbidden to be dramatized again. Apparently, the *polis* did not appreciate being reminded of its recent failure to aid the Milesians in their time of need.

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (458 BC) provides one of the most frequently used examples of a drama which makes allusions to the city's current events, especially in the concluding play of the trilogy, *Eumenides*, while its actions and characters remain located in the mythical past. Produced just three years after the important and controversial reforms to the composition and duties of the Areopagos council (462/1), Aeschylus boldly depicts the original creation of this same council in this play. Athene, the city's patron goddess, selects the "finest of [her] citizens" (line 487) to sit as jurors in the trial of Orestes for murder and at lines 681–710 pronounces their formal mandate. The court proceedings themselves closely mirror the actual process as it was conducted at Athens, from the initial discovery that Athene undertakes with the disputants through to the trial's conclusion. Aeschylus does not come down for or against the reforms of the Areopagos Council, but the dramatic effect of its institution is heightened against the contemporary background.

Earlier in this same play (289–91), Orestes offers a pledge to bind Argos in eternal friendship to Athens, which he later reiterates at greater length in the form of an oath in response to his acquittal on the charge of murder (762–74). Athens and Argos had a few years early concluded a treaty that bound them together as allies. On one level, then, historical reality is back-dated and justified by a reworking of myth in the context of drama. Argos is presented as a metaphorical lost sheep who has finally returned to the fold, its former alliance with Sparta to be excused, since its debt to Athens, because of Orestes' acquittal, has finally been honored. All is now as it was intended to be from ancient times.

Other tragedians have also been seen to bring contemporary issues before the audience in the guise of old myths. Euripides' *Trojan Women* has frequently been read as a critique of Athens' inhumane treatment of the citizens of Melos in 416 or alternately as a reaction to the feverish preparations for the massive armada against Sicily. For some the Theban refusal to allow immediate burial of the Athenian dead at the battle of Delion in 424 was the inspiration for Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, in which the bodies of the Argive dead lie unburied at Thebes. Many critics have seen, beneath

Oedipus in Sophokles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, the figure of Perikles, at that time the leading political force at Athens. However, hunting for allusions to these events in every extant tragedy has not proven to be a particularly productive task. Lurking beneath this discussion is the question of whether a specific issue or person in contemporary Athens "inspired" a playwright to choose a particular mythical subject or to develop that subject in a certain way. Redfield (1990: 325–6) argues cogently that the poets relied on the spectators' contemporary experience to make the dramatic situation more believable: "Oidipous in the *Tyrannos* is like Perikles . . . not because Sophokles intended a point about Perikles, but rather (I am suggesting) because he relied on his audience's understanding of Perikles to create for them a believable Oidipous."

Evidence of the relationship between the *polis* and tragic drama has been more fruitfully found in the study of the plays' engagement with the governing political institutions of the *polis*: the law-courts, assemblies, and councils. In the law courts, prosecution and defense were competitors in a contest (*agōn*), who must through persuasive argumentation convince as many people as possible of the rightness or justice of their position. Similarly in both the assembly and the council, where the number of competing voices might be many, men would propose a course of action, entertain counter-proposals, debate their individual merits, and otherwise engage each other in matters of importance to the city, ultimately voting to accept or reject a proposition as "right" or "not right" for the *polis* respectively.

Such contests of words had long been a part of Greek political practice, as evidenced in the epic tales of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, while the responsibility for those in positions of power to govern well and choose rightly was divinely mandated by Zeus (as at Hesiod *Works and Days* 225–47). The decision-making process had long been established as a collective one. In the leaders' council of the *Iliad* (9.9–79), any member was free to put forward a proposal which the council would either endorse or reject as seemed proper. Thus whether an audience member at the City Dionysia was an Athenian or a visitor from another Greek *polis*, he would have had some familiarity with these types of decision-making bodies and processes.

Both tragic and comic texts reveal their indebtedness to these political institutions in the way they employ argument and counter-argument, leading to a decision which moves their plots forward. Audience members, familiar with this sequence of events through participation in their city's assembly, council and courts, would have been encouraged through this familiarity to listen and judge the matter of the drama in the same manner as they would at those other venues. But there was one crucial difference. The dramas that they witnessed revealed the outcome of the decision made, permitting them to re-evaluate the rightness of the course of action taken, which, according to one view, turned tragic drama into a type of teaching tool for the hazards of ill-informed and short-sighted decision-making and comic drama into a farcical lesson in political (in)correctness.

But drama could deal with less obviously "political" institutions, those governing marriage and inheritance, interstate relationships and treaties, the guest-host obligations of *xenia*, each based on long-established norms of reciprocity and an ethical imperative that demanded that one "help one's friends and harm one's enemies." In both genres, but especially in tragedy, honoring the obligations of these long-standing

socio-political institutions becomes problematic in particular situations and here we shift from a consideration of the political institutions in drama to a discussion of political issues in dramatic content.

Probably the most common of themes in tragedy is that of justice (*dikē*), which underlies every surviving play to a greater or lesser degree. The question, “where does justice lie in this situation?”, is raised in Euripides’ *Medea* and *Andromache*, for instance, or Sophokles’ *Ajax* and Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* in relation to the bonds of marriage and the responsibility of parents to children. In *Ajax* and Sophokles’ *Philoktetes* and *Antigone* as well as Euripides’ *Orestes*, *Hecuba*, and *Suppliant Women* (to name only three) the justice of the Greek ethical imperative to “help friends and harm enemies” is rendered problematic for it conflicts with the institution of *xenia* (the guest–host relationship). Thus the needs and obligations to friend and family are set against those of the community at large, and ask the larger question of which socio-political institutions should take precedence in a given situation. These problems may be presented in the familiar story-line of myth, but can be easily extrapolated to apply to matters of importance to the contemporary audience where these same institutions give expression to civic values and shape the appropriate modes of civic behavior. But the assessment of how well or poorly one treats one’s friends depends on how one’s friends are defined. The assessment of whether one is legally married or one’s children legal citizens is determined by the laws of the city. For the citizen in any *polis* personal decisions have political implications and consequences. Tragic drama exploits these to great effect, providing a forum in which to assess the justness of the contrary demands placed on the individual and so to reassess the definitions and demands that are the source of problems in the city.

Drama and democracy

Tragedy, then, has a great deal in it that we would identify as political content. But to what degree can this content be called primarily or specifically “democratic” in orientation rather than about the *polis* in more general terms? This question has become a major subject of debate. We know that the audience at the City Dionysia was not wholly Athenian, but included visitors from other Greek *poleis*. We also know that tragedies were exported and performed in a number of cities whose constitutions were anything but democratic. Those who hold that the City Dionysia’s tragedies were more general in their politics than specifically democratic make use of these two facts (among others) in support of their position. Carter (2004:14), for instance, argues that of our thirty-one extant tragedies only Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* and *Suppliants* and Euripides’ *Suppliant Women* and *Orestes* present governing institutions as democratic, while Aeschylus’ *Persians* and Euripides’ *Children of Herakles* engage in “the explicit promotion of democratic ideology.”

On the other side, those who hold that that this genre was especially democratic in orientation point to the fact that the majority of our extant dramas comes from a period when Athens was a radical democracy, in which the Athenians took great pride. In fact, Athens is never berated in tragedy. In the choral odes of all the playwrights, Athens is always presented as the ideal city. It is the preferred destination of

refugees as a city that welcomes and protects its suppliants, even to the point of going to war to defend them. It is the place where justice prevails over personal vendetta and where its king seeks the will of the people rather than ruling by fiat. When Athenians behave badly or unfortunately, the setting is usually not Athens (e.g., Kreousa at Delphi in *Ion*, Theseus at Troizen in *Hippolytos*). But are these observations in the tragic texts anything more than an extension of the self-promoting program of the festival's first day?

Proponents of a decidedly "democratic" political content in tragedy may be on firmer ground when they observe that the twin principles of *isonomia* ("equality before the law") and *parrhēsia* ("freedom to speak") on which democracy was founded, and which became by-words for democracy itself, find expression in the tragedies. Despite Hecuba's belief in the culpability of Helen, she insists that Menelaos at least listen to Helen's argument in defense of her own actions (*Trojan Women* 906–10). On the other hand Elektra, in Sophokles' play of that name, suggests that Aigisthos should be denied the right to speak before his execution, for there is nothing he could say which would alter her hatred of him (1484–90). When in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* Pelasgos is faced with the difficult decision of deciding whether to accept and thus defend his distant relatives, the Danaids, he insists (365–9) that even though he is king, he must put the matter before the people, an anachronistic projection of democratic practice into the mythical past of Argos. Similarly Euripides anachronistically has Tyndareus suggest that Orestes could have had his mother prosecuted for the murder of his father rather than dispatching her himself (*Orestes* 492–5). Later in this same play Orestes' guilt is debated in assembly, where even a lowly farmer is permitted to offer his opinion on the matter and propose an appropriate course of action (917–30). The benefits of citizenship in a democratic *polis* are more directly highlighted in a debate between Theseus, Athens' legendary king, with a Theban herald who supports monarchy (*Suppliant Women* 395–510). The examples could be multiplied.

However, in these last two examples, both from Euripides, the pitfalls of democracy are also given expression. The members of judicial assembly called together to decide on Orestes' guilt and punishment are shown to be driven by differing vested interests, while the verdict is arrived at through a combination of immoral argument and intimidation. Similarly the Theban herald's critique of the democratic process draws attention to the problem that both personal and factional interest pose to good governance and decision-making. For some this apparent freedom to question the values and institutions of the Athenian *polis* in the guise of the mythological re-enactments of tragedy and the farcical representations in comedy serves as evidence that the content of both genres was specifically democratic. We do not know whether this public challenging of normally unquestioned values and practices was always part of tragic drama at the City Dionysia. But we might suspect it was, given that the City Dionysia, like the Lenaia, was also a period of "sacred time" in which liberties not normally granted to citizens were made available. Part of the reason why tragedy in the fifth century had the liberty to address political issues in the form it did, may be located in the fact that the festival took Dionysos Eleuthereus as its patron.

One of the reasons why this debate over the political nature of the content of Athenian tragedy continues, is that it has proven difficult to reconcile what is known to have been a deeply emotional experience for the audience, with the more cerebral

instruction in democratic decision-making that is often proposed. On the latter argument the spectators would be watching their tragedies as though they were at a meeting of the assembly or sitting as jurors in a court case, keeping their emotional engagement in check and viewing and assessing the words and actions in a highly intellectual and disaffected manner. However, contrary to modern expectation, the political deliberations conducted in these two institutions were far from emotionless, high-minded, intellectual discussions. The emotions most engaged and exploited by tragedy (especially pity and fear) and comedy (especially anger and indignation) were precisely the emotions called upon in the assessment of arguments presented in the democratic institutions of the assembly and law-courts (Rosenbloom 2012). Because pity and indignation each have a cognitive component that involves the moral assessment of the agent, the action and the result upon which one's response to them is based, they are appropriate and indeed necessary for effective deliberation and the exercise of justice. By arousing these emotions, the playwrights thus offered their Athenian audience members the pleasurable opportunity to flex their emotionally informed deliberative skills without having to implement and live with the consequences of an actual decision.

Clearly there is nothing especially democratic about these emotions in themselves, and citizens of other *poleis* may well have had their pity, fear, anger, and indignation aroused by very different aspects of a comedy or tragedy than would their Athenian counterparts. But they could experience the pleasure of being emotionally and intellectually stimulated by what they had seen and heard at the City Dionysia. This helps to explain why both genres appealed to audiences outside of Athens whose constitutions were less democratic and even undemocratic. However, although this expanded perspective on the relationship between the drama and Athenian political processes serves to enhance our understanding of the importance of City Dionysia for the Athenians, it does not allow us to conclude that the "politics" of tragedy were specifically democratic rather than more generally "about the *polis*." The debate is likely to continue for some time.

Recommended Reading

Greek drama

- Csapo and Slater 1995: A very useful English translation of the documentary evidence for Greek and Roman drama (literary, inscriptional, artistic), with preliminary discussions and some illustrations.
- Easterling and Knox 1985: Contains informative essays by a number of leading scholars in the field, pitched at the level of the non-expert.
- Sommerstein 2002: The first half provides a basic survey of the history of Greek drama and dramatists. The second half contains an anthology of ancient texts and a useful annotated bibliography.
- Walcot 1976: An insightful and sensitive discussion of both the performance conventions and the social background of Greek drama.

- Winkler and Zeitlin 1990: A collection of more specialized essays on the larger aspects of Greek drama, dealing with matters of performance and the social context.

Greek theater

- Dugdale 2008: A very useful little book, designed for students and instructors of Greek theater and full of informative comment with many plans and illustrations.
- McDonald and Walton 2007: A good collection of specialized essays, the first group covering “text in context,” the second “the nature of performance.”
- Rehm 1992: A leading scholar and practitioner of Greek theater, Rehm studies how Greek tragedy worked. He first discusses Athens as a “performance culture,” and then four specific tragedies to illustrate his analysis.
- Taplin 1978: One of the first major contributors to performance theory, Taplin discusses various aspects of how Greek tragedy was staged, using three plays by each tragedian as templates for his discussion.
- Wiles 2000: One of the leaders in the field of Greek theater, Wiles presents several provocative essays on the subject, social background, and later reception of Greek drama in production.

Greek drama (visual)

- Bieber 1961: A massive and well-illustrated assemblage of material on the ancient theater. Much new evidence has appeared since 1961 and new conclusions reached, but this is still a useful collection to have under one cover.
- Green and Handley 1995: A brief collection of images, based principally (but not exclusively) on material in the British Museum. Covers the visual evidence from the ancient theaters, inscriptions, sculpture, and vases.
- Taplin 1993: The initial study of vases illustrating the production of tragedy and especially comedy, arguing that the so-called *phlyax-vases* display scenes from Athenian comedy.
- Trendall and Webster 1971: A collection of nearly 200 items, mostly vases and terracotta statuettes, covering pre-dramatic monuments, tragedy, satyr-drama, and comedy, each entry with picture(s) and commentary.

Drama and dionysos

- Csapo and Miller 2007: An insightful collection of essays on the early history of Greek drama and the rituals of Dionysos, with special emphasis on the visual and archaeological evidence.
- Goldhill 1987: A response to Taplin’s claim (1978) that “there is nothing intrinsically Dionysiac about Greek tragedy,” by arguing that the festival of Dionysos allowed poets to exploit tensions within the *polis*.

- Wiles 2007: A theoretical study of masks and the wearing of masks in ancient Greece, followed by practical examples of the use of masks in modern productions.

Drama and politics

- Carter 2004: A qualification of Goldhill's thesis (1987) on the political nature of tragedy, showing that Athenian tragedy travelled well to states that were not democracies.
- Carter 2011: Sixteen useful essays by leaders in the field, arranged in six sections ("context," "discourse," "choruses," "families," "suppliants," "Athens and Greece"), each with a summary and a response.
- Griffin 1998: A rejection of attempts to see tragedy as expressing the aims and methods of the civic democracy at Athens, preferring to regard tragedy as entertainment.
- Rosenbloom 2012: A study of drama and democracy from the point of view of the dominant emotions of pity, fear, anger, and indignation, which are fundamental both to democracy and to drama.
- Seaford 2000: A response to Griffin's (1998), Seaford argues that tragedy provided not only a communal emotional response but also a resolution of the tension between tyranny and democracy.

Greek Tragedy

“Tragedy” must be one of the most over-used and misused words in modern culture. Open the newspaper, watch the news on television, listen to reports on the radio, and one hears constantly of “a tragedy,” on the roads, in the skies, in a house fire, or in the deserts of Africa. But what makes “tragedy” different from “accident” or “misfortune,” or from more high-powered terms such as “disaster” and “catastrophe”? Is this just an example of dramatic hyperbole?

Today “tragedy” implies loss of life. It is more than bitter human suffering; it is the death of those involved, usually at the hands of other human beings or a force of nature. The tragedy is properly that of the victims, and while the perpetrator (if any) may be brought to justice, we do not today speak of the “Tragedy of Macbeth,” as Shakespeare did. But not all death is “tragic.” There needs to be something more than mere loss of life in the modern view of “tragedy.” One answer is “waste,” and coupled with that waste circumstances that arouse an immense sadness or pathos. A tragedy is something overwhelming and something unnecessary; it need not have happened, someone or something could have averted it, someone is to blame. This gets us close to a linear plot: if the neighbor had closed the gate or covered the pool, if the parent or child-minder had been watching, then the “tragedy” of a child drowning might not have happened. “Ifs” make for a good plot-line, and in tragedy **Aristotle** maintains (*Poetics* chapter 6), plot (*mythos*) is king. For us as for the Greeks, tragedy raises larger issues about humanity and the universe (or the divine), and the place of humanity in that larger scheme. Thus in modern parlance “tragedy” suggests death and destruction, in an unexpected and unnecessary fashion, with a perceptible “dramatic” line of events, and an overwhelming accompaniment of grief and sorrow, not just for those involved directly, but for anyone who reads or watches the story.

We must prune some of these modern implications of “tragedy” when we come to study and appreciate Greek drama. While many of the plays do end with the deaths or devastation of the characters in the story – as in **Aeschylus’** *Agamemnon*, *Libation-Bearers*, and *Seven*; **Sophokles’** *Ajax*, *Antigone*, or *Trachinian Women*; **Euripides’** *Medea*, *Bacchae*, *Herakles*, *Hecuba*, *Phoenician Women*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis* – other plays do not end so destructively (e.g., Sophokles’ *Oedipus at Kolonos*, where Oedipus’ passing is a relief). In several instances the plays have a “happy ending” with catastrophe averted, such as Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*; Sophokles’ *Philoktetes*; Euripides’ *Andromache*, *Ion*, *Helen*, *Orestes*, *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*. Yet the ancients would have called these “tragedies.” Aristotle himself seems to have conflicting views on what makes the best tragedy. In *Poetics* chapter 13 the ideal tragedy occurs when a character, who is neither a paragon of virtue nor a model of wickedness, falls into misfortune through some *hamartia* (“error”), but in the very next chapter the best plot occurs when a recognition stops someone short of committing an unspeakable deed.

Underlying Greek tragedies is a tragic pattern of events, sometimes that of crime and punishment, sometimes the direct work of the gods, but events happen in a manner that for all the sorrow seems appropriate somehow. Aristotle makes it clear that the stories of tragedy belong to the great families (“those with great reputation and prosperity”), principally so that their fall into misfortune might be more dramatic, but even with Euripides, who treated the traditional myths with a down-to-earth realism, we are not dealing with stories of everyday life and characters. Elsewhere (chapter 6) he defines tragedy as “the representation (*mimēsis*) of a serious action.” The Greek for “serious” is *spoudaios*, something that one must pay attention to and treat with respect. Thus a tragedy may end happily, and disaster may be averted, but the potential for disaster remains and issues of some magnitude will be part of the story.

“Goat-song”

The Greek for “tragedy” is *tragōidia*, etymologically *tragos* (“goat”) plus *ōdē* (“song”). In the classical period, however, the usual term was not the singular noun, *tragōidia* (“tragedy”), but the plural *tragōidoi* (“tragic singers”). In either case we have no problem with the second part (“song”), since tragedy very probably developed from songs and dances performed publically on festival occasions and in the tragedies of Aeschylus choral songs can comprise half the drama. But what have goats to do with tragedy? Scholars ancient and modern have considered a range of possibilities. Since Aristotle asserted that “tragedy originated from something rather satyric” (*Poetics* 1449a20) and since certain ancient sources described satyrs as goat-like in appearance, some concluded that tragedy arose from these singers dressed as goats, thus “song of the goats.” But *tragōidoi* should not mean “goat singers,” but singers with some connection to a goat. Furthermore, satyrs were not depicted as goat-men until the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In the sixth century, when tragedy supposedly evolved from “something satyric,” satyrs were shown in art with the characteristics of horses, not goats. Others suggest that tragedy developed out of a choral performance at the sacrifice of a goat – tragedy thus is “song at the goat.” Scullion (2005) supports the

explanation offered on the Parian Marble (third century) and by Horace (*Art of Poetry* 220–2; first century) that tragic singers competed for a goat as prize. Hence tragedy is “song for the goat.” More radically Winkler (1990) proposed that the choruses in Athenian tragedy were composed of the *ephēboi*, young men aged eighteen and nineteen, going through formal state-service as part of their rite of passage. Part of this service, he argues, was to serve as the *choreutai* in the dramatic festivals. He suggests that *tragos* (“goat”) was a colloquial term for adolescent young men because of their breaking voice, body odor, and lewd behavior. We might compare our use of “kids” as the colloquial equivalent of “children.” On Winkler’s interpretation the *tragōidia* is again “song of the goat(s),” but in a metaphorical sense.

Winkler’s theory is not without its attractions, and certainly young men could handle the physical strain of four dramatic performances in a single day. Regimen and discipline would apply to ephebic service and choral training alike, again appropriate for these cadets. But these ephebes would have to have been part of the dramatic choruses from the early days of tragedy in order that this nickname be applied to the genre as a whole, and there is no real evidence for a formal institution of the *ephēbeia* before the fourth century. Why name these performers with a colloquial expression? And would a dramatic career in the chorus last only two years? Would a producer or a poet not want talented performers with life-long experience? On balance the tragedy as “song at the goat-sacrifice” or “song for the goat” seem the safest at the moment.

Herodotos (5.67.5; mid fifth century) records that at Sikyon the *pathea* of the legendary king Adrastos were celebrated by “tragic choruses,” which Kleisthenes, **tyrant** of Sikyon in the second quarter of the sixth century, transferred to the cult of Dionysos. *Pathea* can be as strong a word as “sufferings” or as mild as “life experiences,” and as the myths of Adrastos contain both exploits and sufferings, these “tragic songs” may not have been exclusively songs of sufferings. But if they were in any sense dramatic, they would predate the introduction of drama at Athens by a few decades. Herodotos was resident at Athens for some years and may here be explaining how tragedy came to be associated with Dionysos, as it was at Athens. Kleisthenes, the founder of the Athenian democracy, was the grandson of the tyrant of Sikyon. Herodotos (1.23) also names Arion (a poet active ca. 600 at Corinth) as “the first man that we know of who created, named, and performed the **dithyramb**.” A much later writer cites a statement of Solon (Athenian law-giver and poet, active 596–570; F 30a) that Arion in fact created “the first tragic drama.” Another late source names the otherwise unknown Epigenes of Sikyon as the first tragic poet, earlier than **Thespis**, the traditional Athenian “inventor.” Thus there are hints of something that the ancients could with the benefit of hindsight call “tragedy,” something from outside Athens and earlier than tragedy at Athens.

The most influential source for the early history of tragedy is Aristotle (*Poetics* chapters 2–5), who makes a number of statements about the development of drama, although with Aristotle there is the ever-present question of whether he knows what he is talking about. Aristotle seems to give conflicting accounts of early tragedy. First is his well-known statement that tragedy arose “from those who led off the dithyramb” (1449a10–11). It is worth quoting in full Aristotle’s words here, since it gives us an insight into how he was approaching the subject:

[tragedy] coming from an origin in improvisation – and also comedy, the former from those who led off (*exarchontōn*) the dithyrambs, and the latter from those [who led off] the phallic performances, which still even today remains a custom in many cities – grew little by little as they developed whatever they noticed in it, and after undergoing many changes it stopped [growing] when it had attained its own form.

Aristotle then regards tragedy as a growing plant or creature, which reaches its mature form and then stops changing.

The dithyramb was a large-scale choral song and was performed as part of the **City Dionysia**. Competitions for ten men's and ten boys' choirs of fifty voices occupied the first day of the festival, and are still recorded as late as the 320s. If tragedy did, as Aristotle suggests, develop out of the dithyramb, then the parent art-form did not wither away or evolve into its child, but remained a living, breathing, changing genre of poetry, whose later practitioners were prominent and controversial enough to attract the attention of comedy. Certain ancient pieces of evidence suggested a neat pattern: the attribution of the dithyramb to Dionysos by Archilochos in the seventh century (F 120):

For I know how to lead off [*exarxai*] the fair song of Lord Dionysos,
when my wits are thunderblasted with wine,

the use of the same word *exarchein* ("lead off") in both Archilochos and Aristotle, the association of Arion with both tragedy and dithyramb, and the contests for dithyramb along with tragedy at the City Dionysia.

But immediately after this Aristotle, commenting on the grandeur of tragedy (or perhaps on its length), adds: "Then there is grandeur. From slight plot-lines and ridiculous language tragedy was late in becoming dignified, developing as it did from something rather satyric." Unless the early dithyramb was something performed by "satyrs," Aristotle seems to be saying something different here, that tragedy evolved from some sort of primitive performance with men dressed up as satyrs. Finally just before the passage on tragedy and dithyramb, Aristotle has elaborated upon his earlier distinction of poetic subjects into the serious and the ridiculous by saying: "When tragedy and comedy appeared, the poets turned to each sort of poetry according to their own nature, becoming poets of comedy instead of iambic, and creators of tragedy instead of epic." In other words the development of tragedy is a literary one, with its ultimate roots in the serious epics of **Homer** (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*).

Tragedy then may have been a conscious literary creation that developed out of a choral performance of the serious stories of epic. During the mid sixth century somebody began to enact the stories of myth before a public audience, rather than just sing about them. The term *exarchōn* implies a leader of the chorus, and a dialogue between leader and full chorus in the dithyramb or other choral song could well have developed into drama, as the leader took individual roles in the narration. In Bacchylides 18 a soloist (Aigeus, king of Athens) and a chorus sing alternating stanzas describing the approach of Theseus to Athens. But Bacchylides' poem belongs to the early fifth century, perhaps two generations after the introduction of tragedy, and his eighteenth



Figure 2.1 *Basel Choristers, from a red-figure column-krater, ca. 480s. Reproduced courtesy of the Antikenmuseum, Basel (BS 415).*

ode is not the “missing link” in the development of that genre. But it is not impossible that proto-tragedy was something like what we see in Bacchylides.

What sort of choral performance might have given rise to tragedy? The dithyramb, with its possible associations to Dionysos, would be a strong contender, but these performers were not masked. Masks *are* found in religious ritual, and it might have been one of these that gave rise to tragedy – for comedy the worship of Artemis at Sparta involved masked figures behaving in comic fashion. Alternatively the mysteries of Eleusis featured a performance of sorts to a large (indoor) audience, where “things were said, things were done, and things were shown.” The search of Demeter for her abducted daughter is a sort of linear drama, and we might wonder whether tragedy sprang from an enactment of such a cult myth. Perhaps all we can say is that tragedy was the product of an evolution in choral performance: from the group retelling of a myth in song, through a dialogue between leader and chorus, to the point where the leader became an independent performer, doing rather than telling the story, and at that point serious drama was born. A vase dating from the early fifth century (*Basel Choristers*,” fig. 2.1) may show what an early tragic chorus looked like. Three pairs of dancers with identical costumes and facial expressions are dancing vigorously

before a raised structure (altar or tomb?), decked with ribbons and crowns, behind which is seen a shrouded figure. At the end of Aeschylus' *Persians* the ghost of Dareios rises to comment on the woes of the Persians, but the vase shows a chorus of active youths, not elderly men, and *Persians* (472) is at least twenty years later than the vase.

The ancient sources attribute the "invention" of tragedy at Athens to Thespis, whose first official production is dated to the year 535/4. Thespis is credited with developing dramatic features that belong to the actor: prologues, masks, and speeches to the chorus. Whatever the historical truth about Thespis, he marks that point where choral performance gave way to drama, where the actor became a separate entity from the chorus, a process which would lead ultimately to the prominence of the individual character and the decline of the chorus. A few titles are assigned to Thespis, including a *Pentheus*, the antagonist of Dionysos in Euripides' *Bacchae*; this may or may not be significant for the association of drama with Dionysos.

Rather more controversial is the date. If the traditional date of 534 is correct, then tragedy becomes the creation of the Athenian tyranny under Peisistratos (546–527). The Athenian tyranny was, apart from its last four years (514–510), anything but "tyrannical." In fact the tyrants were responsible for much of the economic, political, and cultural rise of Athens, the latter including the first splendid buildings and sculpture on the Acropolis, the contests for the recitation of Homer, the competitions at the great festival of Athena (the Panathenaia), and the invitations to artists and poets to visit the court at Athens. Dating tragedy to 534 makes it one of the cultural achievements of the tyrants, one whose effects would be felt for centuries after.

But more recent critics have wanted to downdate the introduction of tragedy to the end of the sixth century. The dramatic records seem to go back no further than ca. 501; the first dramatists that we have any details for (**Phrynichos**, Pratinas) belong to the late sixth and early fifth centuries; and archaeologists argue that the earliest theater on the south-eastern slopes of the Acropolis belongs also to this period. An introduction of tragedy in 534 and then twenty-five years of relative inactivity is rather suspicious. The later date makes tragedy the child of the new democracy established in 507, while Dionysos Eleuthereus ("Freer"), related in part to the movement of a cult of Dionysos from Eleutherai and in part to the liberating aspects of the god, could also be seen as the patron god of the new democracy, now "free" of tyrants. On this reading tragedy becomes directly relevant to the experience of democratic Athens. For some Thespis becomes a figure of legend from a period before the formal establishment of tragedy, but we might consider a scenario that accommodates both traditions. Peisistratos' inaugural City Dionysia in 534 might have included a performance by Thespis of this new art-form, which would later be named "tragedy." There may not have been an actual competition at this point, and if his reward were a goat (the third-century *Marmor Parium* reads "the poet Thespis performed for the first time, who put on a drama in the City [the usual phrase for the City Dionysia], and a goat was given . . ."), the etymology of tragedy as "song for the goat" is supported. A thoroughgoing revision of the festival ca. 501, perhaps in the glow of the new democracy, could have introduced competitions, added **satyr-drama**, and perhaps relocated performances to the theater beside the sanctuary of Dionysos. But what tragedy was like in the thirty-year interval remains unclear.

On the Nature of Greek Tragedy

We begin by considering two concise descriptions of tragedy, one ancient, one modern. First in *Poetics* (chapter 6) Aristotle provides his formal definition of tragedy, in terms that do not readily explain themselves and about which there is great debate:

Tragedy is the representation [*mimēsis*] of a serious and complete set of events [*praxis*], having a certain size, with embellished language used distinctly in the various parts of the play, the representation being accomplished by people performing and not by narration, and through pity and fear achieving the *katharsis* of such emotions.

By “embellished language” Aristotle means that in the **episodes** the poet employs spoken verse in the high style, and in the songs sung lyrics. What “the *katharsis* of pity and fear” means is hotly contested. Ridding (“purging”) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear by the on-stage spectacle would imply that emotions are something undesirable that need to be purged – **Plato** might agree but not Aristotle. *Katharsis* in Greek means more properly “purification.” Is Aristotle then suggesting that through the draining of excess emotion one’s emotional situation is better off after proper exercise and tragedy helps achieve the proper balance? Elsewhere (*Politics* 1341a17) he uses the same term, *katharsis*, to describe the result of treating emotional excess (pity, fear, *enthousiasmos*) by homeopathic means. Tragedy is thus the way to restore a healthy balance of pity and fear in the soul. Aristotle in *Poetics* is trying to counter Plato’s dismissal of poetry in *Republic* (2.3.10) by finding a justification for it. For Aristotle then tragedy is a poetic representation of a serious pattern of events intended to create a strong emotional response in its audience.

A modern definition of tragedy was provided in 1889 by the noted classical scholar Wilamowitz:* “An **Attic** tragedy is a self-contained piece of heroic legend, poetically reworked in elevated style for dramatic presentation by a chorus of Attic citizens and two or three actors as part of public worship in the sanctuary of Dionysus.” We may want to substitute “entertainment” for “worship” and to wish that Wilamowitz had expanded upon “heroic” to embrace something like Aristotle’s “serious” and the emotional power of tragedy. But essentially he has brought to the fore the central aspects of a Greek tragedy. Tragedy is poetry rather than prose, performance rather than narration, a self-contained pattern of events, usually concerning the characters and themes from traditional myth, and was intended to arouse an emotional and aesthetic response from a massed audience.

Greek tragedy is not realistic drama. Taplin (1978) has well described its stage conventions as “theatre of the mind.” For all that “drama” means “doing” or “acting” in Greek, not much happens visibly in a Greek tragedy. The “doings” are done off stage: murders, suicides (apart from that of Ajax), accidents, debates, rescues. The setting is usually fixed in place and anchored by the chorus. Thus Greek tragedy does not have the mobility of Shakespearean tragedy, where the setting can go from a

* U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides Herakles*, vol. 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1889), 108.

blasted heath to a castle interior, from the streets of Rome to a battlefield at Philippi. What we see are scenes strung along a connecting cord and the action has to come to the central nexus before the spectators. Changes of setting are rare. This is perhaps why *Eumenides* is so breath-taking a tragedy, with three different settings and a theater empty of the chorus at line 234.

Props and stage-effects are also rare. The *ekkyklēma* could bring interior scenes to the larger view, such as the tableau of the dead Phaidra in *Hippolytos*, and the *mēchanē* allowed for aerial appearances. Sophokles is credited with first employing *skēnographia* ("scene-painting"), but this must have been fairly basic and may not even have been changed from play to play. But when an object or a stage property is used in tragedy, it acquires great significance in both the plot-line and in the larger thematic reading of the play. The purple-red carpet in *Agamemnon* on which Klytaimnestra persuades her husband to walk is more than just a sign of her power over him and all males. It is the color of dried blood – Agamemnon walks to his doom on the blood of his victims – and it leads him and the spectators to that ominous central door, which will dominate the first two plays. In the third play the Furies, now Eumenides ("Kindly Ones"), put on new robes of the same purple-red color, no longer sinister but possessing the overtones of majesty. In Sophokles' *Philoktetes* Odysseus and Neoptolemos are intent on retrieving the bow of Herakles, which will be the focus of the attention, as it passes back and forth, mirroring the potential movement of the characters from the island to Troy or to Greece. In Euripides we can cite from *Hippolytos* the suicide note attached to Phaidra's wrist, symbolic of the dominant theme of failed communication, or the *thyrsos* (the wands of power) in *Bacchae*. When tragedy stresses an object or a "special effect," we should pay attention.

This is verse drama, familiar in the English theater from the iambic pentameter of Shakespeare, and the dominant iambic trimeter of Greek tragedy is often taken as something equivalent. But there is a choral element in Greek tragedy, which is far greater than the occasional song in Shakespeare. At times the choral songs (*melē*) rival the iambic episodes in both length and importance, and at their best are far more than interludes, especially in Aeschylus (*Prometheus* excepted) and in Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Bacchae*, where the chorus is integral to the drama. Perhaps we should look for parallels to grand opera, where the combination of recitative and aria corresponds to some degree to the episodes and songs of tragedy, or the modern musical, where, like tragedy, the grand numbers can be fundamental to the story or essentially digressive. The choral songs were composed and performed in an artificial dialect, a form of literary Doric, taken over from the earlier tradition of Greek lyrics. Written in something other than the Attic of the streets and countryside, to the spectator's ear these songs would sound different and formal.

To watch tragedy was also to look at something formal and different. The Pronomos Vase of the late fifth century (see fig. 3.1) shows us tragic actors wearing long and ornately decorated robes, far from normal Attic dress – the Athenians of the fifth century prided themselves on simplicity and decoration or jewelry was a sign of aristocratic pretension, Ionian luxury, or eastern decadence. Some performers (see fig. 1.11) wore a distinctive soft boot (*kothornos*), able to be worn on either foot, hence the joke at a contemporary politician, Theramenes nicknamed "Kothornos," because of

his ability to come down on either side of an issue. The *kothornos* was not, as sometimes assumed, an elevated shoe, designed to increase the actor's height and thus dominate the scene. It was a stereotypical feature of tragedy and not the usual footwear of an Athenian male. And then there is the mask, which played down the character of the individual personality and played up the role that the actor was portraying. The spectators were not looking at familiar people in the *theatron*, but rather actors playing men and women who were visibly different. Another world was unfolding before them. Even in *Persians*, where contemporary people and events form the tragedy, these are assimilated into the world of myth.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of tragedy was the pact assumed between spectators and performers. The former suspend their disbelief and willingly enter the tragic world that unfolds before them, while the actors and chorus maintain that fiction. In other words tragedy does not call attention to itself, but comedy, as we shall see, depends on that barrier being broken. Drama calling attention to itself is now called "**metatheater**," and it occurs often in comedy, but not in tragedy. Shakespeare sometimes punctures the dramatic illusion by a wry comment that for a moment reminds the audience that they are watching a staged performance. One can think of Jacques's lines delivered from a stage, "All the world's a stage and the men and women merely players" (*As You Like It*). Perhaps better is Fabian's comment in *Twelfth Night*:

If this were played upon a stage now, I could
condemn it as an improbable fiction.

Or Casca's words after the assassination of Julius Caesar:

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!

It has been suggested that in a number of places Greek tragedy *does* break its allusion and let the audience know that they are watching a play. Critics have long debated whether the chorus in the great second *stasimon* of Sophokles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* is referring to its identity as Theban elders or Athenian choristers, when they assert (895–6) in reaction to Jokaste's rejection of Apollo's oracles, "if these deeds are held in honor, why should I be dancing [*choreuein*]?" If the latter, then Sophokles intended the spectators to view the chorus simultaneously as dramatic characters and Athenian performers. But the passage works well within its dramatic context, and these lines are balanced in the *antistrophē* (909–10) by a similar conclusion that *is* within the dramatic context, "and nowhere is Apollo seen to have honour, and the divine order crumbles." In Sophokles' *Elektra*, when Orestes enters (1098) with the urn supposedly containing his own ashes, this empty urn has been the starting-point for an extended metatheatrical reading of Sophokles – the spectators *know* that the urn is empty and that Orestes is in more than one sense an actor playing a part.

In the prologue of Euripides' *Medea* the Nurse comments on Medea's frenzied state of mind and fears that she "may be planning something new" (37), and later

Medea herself will announce (790) after foretelling the death of Jason's new bride, *tond' apallassō logon*. This is usually taken as meaning "I consider this account (*logos*) closed," or "I close this chapter," but it could also mean "I am changing the plot," Medea going on to announce "I will kill my children." Here it is argued that Euripides is announcing in advance the major plot-change of his play, the death of the children at Medea's own hand. In *Elektra* a cry is heard in the distance and Elektra fears that this portends bad news, not good, "for where are the messengers?" (759), a wry allusion, it is suggested, to the messenger who arrives just two lines later. Finally in *Bacchae* we have the dressing-scene of Pentheus (912–76), where his donning of the Bacchic costume is seen as metatheatrical to the actual drama itself. When Agave, played by the same actor who has just finished his role as Pentheus, enters with the head of her son, what she is carrying is the mask of Pentheus. This (it is argued) allows the spectators to remove themselves from the dramatic illusion and reflect that they are watching a play. But these arguments, although ingenious, are speculative at best, and it is a safer conclusion that tragedy guards its illusion very carefully.

The tragic plot-line

In *Poetics* (chapters 13–14) Aristotle sets down what he considers the best plot-line for a tragedy, "best" in the sense of arousing pity and fear, which are the characteristic emotions of tragedy:

First of all it is clear that one must not portray admirable men undergoing a change from good fortune to bad, as this is not pitiful or fearful but just dreadful. Nor [should one portray] evil men going from bad to good fortune, as this is the most non-tragic of all; it has nothing of what it should, it is neither pitiful nor fearful nor does it satisfy our human sensibilities. Nor [should one portray] a thoroughly bad person falling out of good fortune into bad, as such a situation might satisfy our human sensibilities but would not furnish pity or fear . . . What is left lies in between these: the situation will involve a person who is not outstanding in either virtue or just behavior, who falls into bad fortune not through vice or wickedness, but through some mistake [*hamartia*], one of those who enjoys great reputation and prosperity.

This passage raises a number of problems of interpretation: that the word used for "admirable" [*epieikēs*] does fit many of the characters in Greek tragedy, that his first category of rejected plot-lines suits Euripides' surviving version of *Hippolytos*, and that Aristotle does not discuss a fourth possible plot, a good person going from bad fortune to good, which would nicely describe Sophokles' *Philoktetes*, and possibly *Oedipus at Kolonos*; Euripides' *Andromache*, *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, *Helen*; and even Orestes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. At the close of this section Aristotle will complain that tragedies with a happy ending are the result of poets pandering to the emotional tastes of the spectators and are in fact more like comedy, "where no-one kills anyone." But as mentioned above, Aristotle will then argue in chapter 14 that the plot-line where the dreadful action is contemplated and then averted is "best."

The thirty extant tragedies reveal no simple formula for the plot-line of a Greek tragedy. In some cases the play depicts a tight sequence of events that end with a result that we would call “tragic.” Deaths and devastation form the climax of the play, and while an epilogue may attempt to redress the matter, what we are left with is overwhelming loss and sorrow at that loss. This can be seen particularly well in Aeschylus’ *Seven*, Sophokles’ *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, and *Trachinian Women*, and in Euripides’ *Medea*, *Hippolytos*, *Hecuba*, *Phoenician Women*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and *Bacchae*. In these plays we can see operating a sequence of logical cause and effect, or of action and reaction.

In some plays we witness the tragic aftermath, where nothing “tragic” happens in the drama itself, but where the results of an earlier catastrophe provide the intense sorrow and loss that tragedy requires. Such is Aeschylus’ *Persians*, in which the “tragedy” is the announcement of the Persian defeat in Greece and the realization by the characters that Xerxes has offended against the law of the gods, “nothing in excess.” We would include here also *Trojan Women*, for there is no causal sequence, just the unrelieved series of atrocities committed against the vanquished. In Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* we see the tragic prelude, since the play sets the stage for the actual tragic action of the next play, where the maidens will murder their bridegrooms on their wedding-night.

In another variation of the tragic plot-line the catastrophe does not come at the climax of the drama, but at an earlier point, so that events may build upon this disaster. Certainly this is how *Oresteia* operates, with the earlier extradramatic sacrifice of Iphigeneia and the fall of Troy and within the trilogy the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra in the first play, and the mirror-scene in *Libation-Bearers*, the tableau of Orestes with the bodies of Klytaimnestra and Aigisthos. The third play (*Eumenides*) contains no “tragic” moment, rather the acquittal of Orestes and the reconciliation of the Furies. Sophokles’ *Ajax* also unfolds in this manner, with the suicide of Ajax coming halfway through, to be followed by a “redemption” effected by his brother and Odysseus, making him the sort of hero worthy to be honored at Athens. In Euripides’ *Herakles*, Herakles’ murder of his family comes not at the end, but in the middle, leaving Amphitryon to bring his son to the awareness of what he has done and Theseus to rescue his friend and give him a new life at Athens.

Then there is the plot-line mentioned above and apparently ignored by Aristotle, where disaster is averted, and a resolved “happy ending” closes the drama. This was called “tragicomedy” by Kitto (1961), “Romantic Tragedy” by Conacher (1967), “Catastrophe Survived” by Burnett (1971) and “Escape plays” by Wright (2005). There is the potential here for tragedy and a point at which events could take a tragic direction, as in Euripides’ *Ion*, where Kreousa’s plan to kill her son (unknown as such to her) might succeed, but in these plays the tragedy fails to materialize. Aristotle preferred “complex” tragedy to “simple” tragedy, because the former possessed such reversals (*peripeteia*) and recognitions, which cause the dramatic direction to be reversed. Such plays include Sophokles’ *Philoktetes*, Euripides’ *Andromache*, *Ion*, *Helen*, *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, and his dark masterpiece, *Orestes*. One might also place here Sophokles’ and Euripides’ *Elektra*, on the grounds that Orestes and Elektra begin the drama in distress and end in triumph, having accomplished the revenge ordered

by Apollo and that disjointed events are now restored to their proper heading. But as these plays also contain murder and revenge and as both are permeated with a darkness in the tragic situation and the characters themselves, it is perhaps safer not to group them with the lighter tragedies of averted catastrophe.

Greek tragedy was particularly fond of the suppliant-play and the rescue-play, with considerable overlap between these. In the former a character or group takes refuge at a shrine, often but not always at Athens, and begs for sanctuary and assistance. The drama of the play depends on whether sanctuary can be given and at what cost and will inevitably feature the debate which Athenian audiences loved, as the issues behind the request are brought into the open. Aeschylus' *Suppliants* perhaps set the pattern for this sub-genre, in which the foreign-looking, but Greek-descended, daughters of Danaos seek a refuge from their cousins who would take them unwillingly in marriage. Sophokles' *Oedipus at Kolonos* is perhaps the most powerful example, where the blind and accursed Oedipus occupies the sacred area before the Grove of the Furies, to remain there seated for over 1000 lines. Euripides was especially fond of combining this theme with the rescue-play, as we find in his *Children of Herakles*, *Andromache*, *Suppliant Women*, with individual scenes in his *Herakles*, *Ion*, *Medea*, and *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*.

Character in tragedy

Aristotle comments definitively in *Poetics* (chapter 6) that actions and plot (*mythos*), not character (*ēthos* – meaning qualities by which an agent's morality can be judged) are the essential end (*telos*) of tragedy, that tragedy is a representation (*mimēsis*) of action (*praxis*) not of people, that without plot there could be no tragedy, but without character (here meaning an agent whose moral qualities can be judged) there might. Modern readers and audiences find this difficult to accept, as we want to pass judgment on the agents who bring about their own disaster, not only in terms of the actions taken and the choices made, but also on their “nature,” their temperament and disposition. As a result, when Aristotle (*Poetics* 13) asserts that in a good tragedy one falls “into bad fortune, not through vice or wickedness, but through some *hamartia*,” this last word has often been mistranslated as “[tragic] flaw,” that is a flaw in one's personality. It is this which prevents the tragic hero from being the fully “admirable” person of Aristotle's first rejected plot-line. To students brought up on the “tragic flaw” in Shakespeare (*Othello*: jealousy, *Macbeth*: ambition) this might seem a natural way to approach Greek tragedy. Modern readers and audiences are used to seeking the explanation for action within the individual and apply this approach to the persons (the “characters”) portrayed in Greek tragedy, in the process distorting what the ancient playwrights have depicted. But Aristotle located the *hamartia* in a choice made or an action taken, not in the persons themselves, whom he recommends be well-known and prospering persons, though “*not outstanding* in either virtue or just behavior.” Tragedy's characters are “good” but imperfect persons who create pity and fear in the spectators not because of the sort of person they are, but because of the mistakes they make.

Thus especially in Aeschylus and Sophokles, characters are more important for what they represent and how they act than for their uniqueness as individual personalities. Eteokles in Aeschylus' *Seven* is at the same time noble defender and cursed child of Oedipus – these are his roles for that play. Orestes and Elektra in *Libation-Bearers* are the “orphaned children of the eagle-father” (247). Aeschylus does not give either child an individuated personality of any great depth; it will be left to Euripides to explore what sort of person could obey an oracle that told him to kill his mother. In *Philoktetes* Neoptolemos is the young man who must decide where his priorities lie. Kreon in *Antigone* is the ruler who puts the state before everything else, Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus, who honors the gods more than men.

This does not imply that there is no depth to tragedy's characters. Wholly believable human beings are set before the spectators, ones whose actions arise from their disposition and, in most cases, a verbalized guiding belief. Oedipus acts as he does because of his desire to solve problems (“I am willing to give any and all forms of aid” 11–12) and discover the truth (1170; “I must hear”), but also because of his misplaced confidence in the fullness of his own knowledge (59–61). In relation to Aristotle's *hamartia*, Winnington-Ingram (1980: 203) writes well that his “flaw” is not a failing of *ēthos*, but of intellect. It is not a question of moral good and bad – the opening scene makes it plain that Oedipus is seen by all as father and savior of his city, and in an Athenian court of law his killing of Laios would be justified as self-defense. We are encouraged to disagree with the Euripidean Elektra's expectation that Orestes is courageous because we have heard his words and the actions that follow from them. As with the dramatists' male characters, so with the female: Aeschylus' Klytaimnestra, Sophokles' Antigone, Euripides' Medea, Elektra, and Kreousa are all deep and memorable characters, each with a strongly delineated disposition and guiding belief that directs their choices and actions.

Nevertheless, modern readers want to discover something more, since for us the inner life of the characters explains their behavior. Ibsen, for instance, described his approach to dramatic creation:[†]

Before I write one word, I have to have the character in mind through and through. I must penetrate to the last wrinkle of his soul. I always proceed from the individual: the stage setting, the dramatic ensemble, all that comes naturally . . . as soon as I am certain of the individual in every aspect of his humanity.

In the method school of acting, the actor becomes his character down to the innermost detail. Accustomed to this type of fuller characterization we seek to get into the mind of Greek tragedy's characters, to find the deeper unexpressed motivations for a character's words and actions. For example, at Aeschylus' *Seven* 181–90, reacting to the terrified utterances of the chorus of maidens, Eteokles dismisses the race of women with contempt, and here the modern reader seeking to find a window into Eteokles' soul may conclude that here is not a “nice” person. Thus in the scene where he assigns the guardians to the seven gates, one may wonder if he has not been spoiling for a

[†] Henrik Ibsen, *Four Major Plays*, vol. 1 (New York: New American Library, 1965).

fight all along with his brother, and will get what he deserves from that desire. When Antigone envisions that she will be buried beside Polyneikes and affirms "I shall lie with him, dear one with dear one" (*Antigone* 73) one might wonder if there is not just a hint of incestuous feelings for that brother. Indeed when Jean Anouilh wrote his *Antigone* in 1941, he made it clear that it is not just a brother whom she is burying, but her favorite brother. Consider Hippolytos, the illegitimate son of Theseus and "the Amazon woman," reared far away from his father's house. Does this explain his aversion to Love and his devotion to the goddess of Virginity? Does the young Pentheus in *Bacchae* have an unnatural obsession with the emotional and sexual side of life and an unhealthy devotion to his mother? All these have been suggested as underlying, unexpressed traits of tragic characters that motivate their actions in their play.

But for Greek tragedy we may want to look at the matter in another way, that the playwright decided first upon his plot-line and the actions of his characters and then gave them the disposition and guiding belief that caused them to behave in that way. Northrop Frye takes this line in defense of Aristotle: "In drama characterization depends on function: what a character is depends on what he has to do in the play. Dramatic function in its turn depends on the structure of the play; the character has certain things to do because the play has such and such a shape."[‡] In other words Greek tragedy offers us little evidence for an individuated personality, that is, of a psychological being with thoughts, desires, hopes and dreams, likes and dislikes that lie unexpressed within the person. But, as we have seen, this does not mean that characters in Greek drama are always portrayed in low relief or are flat or emotionless.

Nor do we have enough information to say how these characters were actually brought out in performance. We hear the words they speak and know the actions they take (or are described as taking by a messenger), but the emotions they express and the other aspects of characterization are lost to us: costuming, the tenor of voice, the pacing of delivery, and the body language employed. In certain places, however, the playwright does allow us to debate how a character in a particular scene might be played. For instance, at *Antigone* 531–81 Antigone rejects her sister and refuses to let her share the blame for burying Polyneikes. Why? Through love and genuine concern that her sister not be hurt, or through spite because Ismene had initially refused to help, or through a sense of personal martyrdom lest Ismene intrude into Antigone's spotlight? The text does not specifically favor one or another interpretation, and much would depend on how that scene was acted and directed. In a crucial scene near the end of both *Philoktetes* and *Oedipus at Kolonos* the protagonist angrily rejects an appeal from a younger male: Philoktetes to Neoptolemos's request that he come to Troy (1314–1401), Oedipus to his son Polyneikes that he support his claim to the throne (1254–1446). In both instances it has been argued that these characters are too angry, that audience sympathy is inclined toward their acceptance of that request. Again much would depend on how that rejection was staged, and these were decisions that the playwright himself would have made for the play's first production and they are decisions still left open to modern directors.

[‡] N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 171.

In modern novels and movies a character may be played differently in two “versions” of the same text. Take two cinematic productions of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, that of Olivier from wartime 1944, full of the martial confidence of the king whose cause is just, and that of Branagh from 1989, where the king himself is uneasy about the justice of his cause and whether he can commit a people to war. As these examples indicate, there is no one King Henry; Shakespeare’s character is as subject to creative representation as the characters of Greek tragedy. In fifth-century Athenian theater there was no requirement that a dramatic character be given the same nature and temperament by other playwrights when they addressed the same subject matter (consider the different characterizations of Orestes by Aeschylus, Sophokles and Euripides) or even that a playwright retain the same nature and temperament of a character across his own plays (witness Sophokles’ three characterizations of Kreon). Every time a new play is performed, the audience watches another version of a great hero from the mythical past who is placed at a decisive moment in his or her life-story. On each occasion they witness this crisis unfold for someone whose disposition and guiding belief is somewhat different to anything they have witnessed before.

As a final comments we should be aware that Aristotle can write *Poetics* 13–14 with no word for “main character,” “protagonist,” or “hero.” In ancient Greek *protagonistēs* meant the principal actor, and *hērōs* a human who had become a semi-divine being after his (or her) death. To denote the person portrayed by the *protagonistēs* the Greeks had only the term *prosōpon* (“face”), the word for the mask worn by the actor, who became the character in performance.

Theater of the word

Taplin (1978) attractively described Greek drama as “theatre of the mind,” in that the impact and effect of the production depends greatly on the spectators. It is not theater of illusion, but theater of convention. Both Greek tragedy and comedy are also “theater of the word.” Although both mime and silent films show that spoken words are not essential, in Greek drama much had to do with the words that were spoken or sung and heard by those listening. In a large *theatron* holding thousands of people the visual spectacle would be small, especially for those seated at the back and upper regions, and any subtlety of action or gesture would be lost. What mattered was what was said and what they heard.

For instance, the Greek theater was especially fond of the messenger-speech. Since many crucial actions take place off stage and are related through the messenger, these speeches must convey not just the gist of what has happened, but the dramatic and emotional circumstances that surround them. The messengers themselves are not faceless ciphers, but each has their own place in the story. The man who reports the death of Hippolytos is one of his companions (1153–1267); in *Bacchae* the first messenger has been part of the attempt to capture the women on the mountain (660–774) and the second was Pentheus’ lone companion on his fatal journey (1024–1152). In *Trachinian Women* the messenger announcing the death of Deianeira is the Nurse whom we have seen earlier in the play. These speeches provide the context, the

opposition, the actual events complete with direct quotation, the conclusion, and often a moralizing comment. They are masterpieces of narration in miniature and must have demanded a high degree of dramatic ability by the actor. Especially memorable are the messenger-scene in *Persians* (290–531) announcing Xerxes' catastrophic defeat, an account preferred by historians to the later "historical" description in Herodotos; the speech of the tutor in Sophokles' *Elektra* (680–763), a brilliant and utterly fictitious report of the chariot-race that "killed" Orestes; and Euripides' *Bacchae* 1043–1120, where the death of Pentheus is narrated in breath-taking fashion. The strangest messenger-speech occurs at Euripides' *Orestes* 1395–1502, reporting the attempted murder of Helen by Orestes and Pylades, not spoken but sung in high lyrics by a Phrygian eunuch.

The Greeks loved debate, and just as a courtroom scene in a modern movie or television show makes for successful drama, in Greek tragedy characters often present sides of an issue in a formal debate (*agōn*). This is especially true of Euripides whose characters were especially fond of rhetoric and debate. We have one formal trial-scene in tragedy, that of Orestes in *Eumenides*, while in *Oedipus at Kolonos* Oedipus and Kreon rehearse the issue of Oedipus' moral and legal innocence and Menelaos presides at a "trial" of Helen in *Trojan Women*. The subject of an *agōn* can be law and morality (*Antigone*), personal guilt and responsibility (*Hippolytos*, both *Elektra*-plays, *Orestes*), political systems (*Suppliant Women*), heroism (*Herakles*), burial of the dead (*Ajax*), and revenge justified (*Hecuba*). The Athenians maintained a self-stereotype of their fondness for litigious behavior, and this shows in their drama.

Audiences enjoyed also a great speech, a declamation on a particular theme or a controversial topic. Just the sound of a character holding forth in argumentative tones and elevated language was something they found appealing. Hippolytos has his great speech (616–68) on the nature of women ("I'll never have enough of hating you women"), Klytaimestra explains the motives for her revenge in terms which approach the blasphemous (*Agamemnon* 1431–47), Kreon explains the priority of the *polis* and re-defines the familial terms of friend (*philos*) and enemy (*echthros*) solely within the context of the city (*Antigone* 162–210). In Euripides' lost *Erechtheus* (F 360) a mother explains why she will let her daughter be sacrificed for the good of the city. In comedy Sokrates will be accused of teaching how to argue the inferior case and win, but it seems that in tragedy also the Athenians enjoyed watching the characters on stage argue and declaim controversial positions.

The parts of tragedy

Contributing to the formality of the genre is a familiar and repeated pattern of scenes and sub-units. Just as a play by Shakespeare was divided into five distinct acts or one's favorite hour-long television show will reach its crisis in the third quarter-hour and its resolution in the last, the Greek tragedians had a repertoire of formal scenes to use in constructing their dramas. Aristotle divides these fundamentally into two: songs and episodes, distinguished partly by meter, partly by accompaniment, and partly by language, the songs being composed in a literary Doric dialect. We may prefer to

catalogue a series of repeated types: prologue, episode, choral song, *kommos*, *monody*, and *exodos*.

Prologues open the drama and are usually set in iambic trimeter, the meter closest to ordinary speech in Aristotle's view. These are usually the province of the actor – one of the developments attributed to Thespis was the prologue – but in Aeschylus' *Persians* and *Suppliants* the chorus opens the drama, not in their artificial Doric and lyric meter, but in the **anapestic** dimeter, an elevated meter but chanted in the Attic dialect. Prologues may take the form of a soliloquy (as in *Agamemnon*, *Libation-Bearers*, *Hippolytos*, *Ion*, and *Bacchae*), in which the speaker provides directly the information that the spectators require, or a dialogue may be employed. The latter allows the dramatic issues to surface early (as in Sophokles' *Antigone* and *Elektra*, Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis*). Prologues may consist of more than one scene. In some cases an original speaker will be joined by a second character (*Trojan Women*, *Alkestis*, *Medea*) or an entirely new scene will follow the first (*Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, Euripides' *Elektra*, *Eumenides*).

The episodes are also predominantly composed in iambic trimeter, although in early tragedy and again in plays after ca. 415 the trochaic tetrameter catalectic can be found in some scenes. The latter was used in comedy for scenes of excited action, and in tragedy it conveyed a raising of the emotional level, perhaps like the sinister music at a tense part of a movie or television show. For the most part actors dominate the episodes, although in plays such as *Suppliants*, *Eumenides*, and *Bacchae* the chorus may play a larger role. In early tragedy the episodes will have been strictly an encounter between the chorus and the one actor – we find this in *Agamemnon*, *Suppliants*, and *Persians*. Apart from the prologues, true soliloquies are rare in Greek tragedy. One exception is Ajax's great speech at *Ajax* 815–65. The chorus has left the playing-area, Ajax enters alone, plants his sword in the earth, and invokes the gods, the sunlight, and his homeland, before falling upon his sword. This has something to do with tragedy's desire to maintain the dramatic illusion. An address to the spectators comes dangerously close to acknowledging their presence, too close in fact to comedy, where addresses to the audience are common-place. Most episodes involve two actors, especially if they are there to debate the issue on which the play will turn, but as the genre developed, three-actor scenes become more common. Given the size of the theater, the distance from the actors, and the fact that the actors were masked, it must have been difficult for the spectators to follow who was speaking, even allowing for exaggerated gestures and body language. We can trace the development of the three-actor scene, from the first startling example (Pylades, mute for 900 lines, breaking his silence for three lines at *Libation-Bearers* 900 [458]), through an awkward scene in *Antigone* (ca. 440) where Kreon talks first with Antigone and then with Ismene (531–81), to confident and polished scenes in *Orestes* (470–629 [408]) and *Oedipus at Kolonos* (1096–1210 [406]).

By the end of the fifth century the episodes dominate the play, separated by choral breaks of decreasing length and relevance. Some of these episodes are of great length: over 400 lines in *Philoktetes* (219–625) and *Orestes* (356–806), dominated by the actors and leaving the chorus little to do. In these late plays the playwrights can insert one episode into another, with the original scene resuming almost as if the interruption had not occurred. In *Orestes* the crucial encounter between Orestes and Menelaos is

interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Tyndareus – here the intervention changes the expected plot. In Sophokles' *Elektra* the confrontation between mother and daughter suddenly breaks off with the entry of the Tutor with the false tale of Orestes' death, and resumes with a grief-stricken Elektra vowing to accomplish the revenge herself. In *Philoktetes* the deception of Philoktetes by the young Neoptolemos is interrupted by the Merchant with another mostly false tale, a scene that adds little to the plot except to increase the urgency and move it along.

The choral odes or songs (*melē*) provide formal breaks between the episodes, and as we have mentioned above, correspond to some degree to the recitative or spoken speech and aria of grand opera. The technical term is *stasimon* ("standing [song]"), since the chorus is now in position in the *orchēstra* and not processing into or out of the playing-area. As mentioned above, in Athenian tragedy the chorus will sing in an artificial Doric dialect and the traditional lyric meters. Choral songs are formally structured as a sequence of corresponding pairs called *strophē* ("turn") and *antistrophē* ("counterturn"). In each pair the metrical pattern tends to be very close, if not identical – this respension, as it is called, allows scholars to detect corruption in the text and to indicate what sort of restoration or emendation is necessary. The terms "turn" and "counterturn" suggest that the chorus may have danced in one direction around the *orchēstra* in the first part and repeated their movement in the opposite in the next. Choral odes often finish with an epode, a single stanza in a meter related to but not identical with the preceding *strophēs* and *antistrophēs*. Sometimes the chorus will process in with a marching-song in an anapestic meter but without the lyrical Doric dialect (as at *Persians* 1–64, *Agamemnon* 40–104) before beginning their initial *stasimon* in the conventional lyric style.

Actors sing in Greek tragedy, both with the chorus and on their own. Aristotle (*Poetics* 1452b24) uses the term *kommos* for a song "performed together by the chorus and from the *skēnē*," the last meaning "by the actors." A *kommos* is a formal lament in metrically responsive stanzas between actor and chorus, the latter responding to the former. Particularly good examples are Antigone's lament at *Antigone* 806–82, and the powerful summoning of Agamemnon's spirit to aid Orestes and Elektra in their revenge (*Libation-Bearers* 306–478). But the term can be used conveniently to describe any formal lyric exchange between actor(s) and chorus. In a number of instances these exchanges precede a speech in iambic by the character in distress, who seems to do things twice, once in lyric and again in iambic. Thus Cassandra in her powerful dialogue with the chorus (*Agamemnon* 1072–1330) sings enigmatically in lyric and then speaks more clearly in iambs, and Alkestis appears to die twice, once at the end of her lyric dialogue with her husband (279) and again at the close of her deathbed scene in iambs (392).

When actors sing on their own, these are called monodies or "solo songs." These preserve the artificial Doric dialect that was expected for sung lyrics, but the metrical pattern becomes astrophic and more freely composed, i.e., not a formal pairing of *strophē* and *antistrophē*. The tone is usually sad, sung by a character in distress, although one important exception is Ion's solo song, where he expresses his joy in being the servant-boy of Apollo (*Ion* 112–83). Kreousa's later monody from the same play (859–922) is a brilliantly emotional display by a character, abandoned by men and by

gods, who has reached her breaking-point. In the later fifth century monodies are not sung by Greek adult men, but by women and males on the margin (the young Ion, the Phrygian eunuch). The emotionalism and the deep feelings expressed were seen to belong better in the mouths of women, boys, and foreigners. In *Ion* the boy's monody occurs before the formal entry of the chorus, and his monody is preceded by a marching-on song in anapests (82–111), chanted by Ion, however, and not by the chorus.

At the end of the tragedy the chorus leave the playing-area, but do not seem to have had a formal marching-off song (*exodos*) that corresponded with the *parodos*, the entry of the chorus. Often we get a few lines, in which the chorus announces its departure, as at *Suppliant Women* 1232–4, “Let us leave, Adrastus, and let us make our pledge to this man and this city; it is fitting for us to honor those who have labored for us” or at *Philoktetes* 1469–71, “Let us all go now together, having said a prayer to the Nymphs of the sea to escort us on our journey.” Variations of certain tags appear at the end of several plays of Euripides:

Divine matters take many forms, and the gods bring many things to pass beyond expectation. What was anticipated does not occur, and for the unexpected the god finds a way. Such has happened here.

And:

O great and awesome Victory, may you rule my life and never cease giving me the crown.

The first group of lines is found at the end of *Alkestis*, *Medea*, *Andromache*, *Helen*, *Bacchae*, and the second at the close of *Phoenician Women*, *Orestes*, *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*. As the last would seem to be a direct appeal to the judges in the manner of comedy, it is very likely an addition from the fourth century. In these plays it appears that the chorus did not have a formal exit song and will have left the *orchestra* presumably with musical accompaniment but not with singing.

Early tragedy (534–472)

Thespis (*TrGF* 1) is little more than a name in the ancient tradition. The *Suda* dates him to the 61st Olympiad (535–532) and assigns him four play-titles including a *Pentheus*, of which Pollux preserves one line (F 1c) that resembles a line from Euripides' *Bacchae* (137). As mentioned above, he is the alleged “founder” of tragedy in 534 and is associated with the creation and development of linen masks, prologues and speeches, in other words the province of the actor. This is clearly a stage in the growth of tragedy to its mature form, and Aristotle will credit Aeschylus with increasing the number of actors to two and playing down the role of the chorus. Thespis' contribution to the development of tragedy lay in giving the actor a formal presence. If the only dramatic interaction lay between one actor and chorus, early tragedy might seem like something primitive, but even in the mature plays of Aeschylus we see how this

can operate effectively. *Agamemnon* and *Suppliants* both have extended scenes with only actor and chorus, but one can see also how the audience might well have tired of entire plays of this form. Presumably the actor would portray one character in one scene, leave, and return as another personality to announce what has happened off stage in the interim. If the single actor had different roles to play, this may explain the use of the mask. If Thespis did write a *Pentheus*, we might reconstruct it as a one-actor drama with episodes involving Dionysos and the chorus, Pentheus and the chorus (ending with his threat to go to the mountain and crush this new deity), and a messenger announcing the fate of Pentheus, and perhaps an epiphany of Dionysos at the end. This may explain why the principal dramatic action in Greek tragedy occurs off stage and why the chorus is continually present on stage. They will have provided both the dramatic continuity and the focus of the drama. News is being brought to them (and to the spectators) for their information and comment. Much of the drama would have consisted of their songs and dances – again Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and *Agamemnon* provide a hint of what that was like. A character in **Aristophanes'** *Wasps* (1479) refers to "those old dances that Thespis brought on." The introduction of a second actor, attributed to Aeschylus, marks the advent of "real" drama, since confrontation and disagreement between principals can now occur before the eyes of the spectators.

Another early name is Choirilos (*TrGF* 2), who competed against Pratinas and Aeschylus in 499–6 (the latter's début) and whom the *Suda* credits with employing masks and outfitting the *skēnē*. Pratinas will be discussed in the section on satyr-drama, although to compete with Aeschylus and other tragedians he must have written tragedy as well.

The one major name of the early period is Phrynichos (*TrGF* 3), whose career (ca. 510 – ca. 470) overlaps rather than precedes Aeschylus. No more than two dozen fragments survive, but we know a considerable amount from other sources. He is credited with inventing the "tetrameter" (probably the trochaic, which Aristotle claims was the original meter of tragedy before the iambic trimeter) and the introduction of female roles. Several sources describe his beautiful songs and striking dancing, even to the point of Aelian's story (*Historical Miscellany* 3.18) that his inclusion of a war-dance in a play led to his election as general. It is likely that his tragedies depended heavily on the chorus.

Two plays connect his drama with events in the outside world. First, Herodotos (2.61.2) recounts how a play of Phrynichos reminded the Athenians of the fall of Miletos in 494, the city which the Athenians had assisted during the Ionian Revolt from Persia. For this he was fined and the play forbidden to be performed again. From Herodotos it appears that the drama was called *Capture of Miletos*, but Snell (*TrGF* 1 p. 74) suggests that *Persians* may have been its actual title. It seems that Phrynichos took his tragic subject from contemporary history. The likely date for this play is 492, a critical year in Athenian history, when the controversial Themistokles was **archon**. We are told that Aeschylus' *Persians* (472) was based upon *Phoenician Women* by Phrynichos. The two opening lines are identical except for one word, and both dealt with the ill-fated Persian expedition against Greece in 480/79. Phrynichos' play opened with a eunuch announcing the defeat of Xerxes, while Aeschylus' opens with

a chorus, to whom the defeat is announced later in the action. Phrynichos is known to have won a victory in 476, a reasonable date for *Phoenician Women*, interesting also because the *chorēgos* was the same Themistokles, who was largely responsible for the Athenian success at Salamis in 480.

Of the surviving fragments only two are longer than a line or so, both from his *Women of Pleuron*. F 6 in lyrics tells of the death of Meleagros:

He did not avoid cold death, a rapid flame devoured him, as the fire-log was consumed by his mother's grim malice.

Pausanias, who quotes this fragment, says that the story of Meleagros was not the main plot-line of Phrynichos' play. The lyric meter suggests that this was part of a choral song. F 2 of his *Alkestis*, "he wears down his fearless, limb-twisted body," suggests that his version of the story also featured Herakles wrestling with Death.

Comedy in the 420s portrays old men as fond of Phrynichos. The aged jurors at *Wasps* 220 enter singing "old honey-sweet Sidonian songs of Phrynichos," while the old Philokleon (*Wasps* 269) walks while singing "a song of Phrynichos." At *Birds* 748 the chorus compare Phrynichos to a bee for the beauty of his lyrics. In the dancing-contest at the end of *Wasps* a dancer "crouches like a cock of Phrynichos" (1490) and a high leaping kick is called the Phrynichian (1524). Plutarch quotes two lines from an elegiac poem attributed to Phrynichos (*TrGF* I 3 T13):

all the figures that Dance has given me, as many as the waves that glowering night produces in a storm at sea.

The comic "Euripides" at *Frogs* 910 (405) describes Aeschylus' audience as "fools raised on Phrynichos." Thus while the beauty of his songs and power of his dances lingered in the memory of later audiences, there was also the feeling that his was old-fashioned and less sophisticated stuff.

Aeschylus

The chorus at Aristophanes *Frogs* 1004 addresses Aeschylus as "the first to build the towering words of tragedy" and he is the first whose plays we have and about whom we can say anything definitive. Keeping in mind the uncertainty of any ancient biographical data, we may consider the following details as reasonably secure:

Aeschylus' Life and Career

525: birth at Eleusis (519 is a less likely date)

499–6: dramatic début

490: fought in the battle at Marathon

484: first tragic victory

Continued

- 480/79: battles of Salamis and Plataia
- 472: victory with four plays, including *Persians*
- ca. 470: first visit to Sicily (restaging of *Persians*)
- 468: loss to Sophokles
- 467: victory with Theban tetralogy (including *Seven*)
- 466–59: victory with Danaid tetralogy (including *Suppliants*)
- 458: victory with *Oresteia*
- 456: final visit to Sicily and death at Gela

He came, not from Athens itself, but from Eleusis, home of the famous mysteries of Demeter and her daughter. Stories in Aristotle and a commentator to Aristotle imply that Aeschylus was accused of revealing the secrets of these Mysteries in his plays. His dramatic début is dated to the Olympiad of 499–6, but his first victory did not come until 484, fifteen years into his career. If we assign him twenty or so productions, with thirteen victories in his lifetime, then his first half-dozen entries were unsuccessful, but were followed by an almost unbroken string of victories thereafter, interrupted perhaps only by Sophokles' victory in 468.

The ancient sources credit him with seventy to ninety plays. A list of known titles slightly exceeds eighty, including the controversial Prometheus-plays. Allowing for the possibility of alternative titles and the loss of some satyr-dramas, a total in the eighties seems reasonable. This would mean that Aeschylus presented twenty-one or so productions (each of three tragedies and one satyr-drama) in a career of roughly forty years. Sophokles staged thirty productions in his sixty-year career and Euripides twenty-three over forty-eight years. A production every other year seems to be the average for a top-rated tragic poet. The *Life of Aeschylus* gives him thirteen victories, the *Suda* twenty-eight. The discrepancy is best explained that beginning some time before 425 a competitor was allowed to re-stage a production by Aeschylus rather than present his own plays, and that Aeschylus thus won fifteen posthumous victories.

Aeschylus paid at least two visits to **Syracuse** in Sicily, the only Greek city which could rival Athens for prosperity and cultural splendor. Hieron, tyrant from 478 to 467, was attracting the leading poets of the day to his court and among the notable guests were Simonides and Bacchylides, Pindar, and Aeschylus. Aeschylus made his first visit between 471 and 469, where he reperformed *Persians* and wrote his *People of Etna*, in part to celebrate Hieron's refounding of that city after the devastating volcanic eruption of 476. A later visit is recorded for 457/6 – the *Life* tells a bizarre story of his death at Gela in Sicily. The author of the *Life* has conflated these two visits when he attributes Aeschylus' departure for Sicily to his pique at being defeated by Sophokles (468), concluding that he never returned to Athens.

Aeschylus and the trilogy

In the fifth century tragedians at the Dionysia would present three tragedies, followed by a satyr-drama. For the most part the plays by Sophokles and Euripides were not

connected in plot or theme, but for Aeschylus and certain other lost poets these plays did have a connection. In this instance we use the terms “trilogy” or “tetralogy,” and it seems that Aeschylus was particularly fond of creating drama in this format. We have firm evidence for four trilogies (or tetralogies, if we include the satyr-drama): one about the cursed house of Laios at Thebes in 467 (*Laios*, *Oedipus*, *SEVEN*, *Sphinx*),[§] the “Daughters of Danaos” produced between 466 and 459 (*SUPPLIANTS*, *Egyptians*, *Daughters of Danaos*, *Amydone*), *Oresteia* in 458 (*AGAMEMNON*, *LIBATION-BEARERS*, *EUMENIDES*, *Proteus*), and a *Lykourgeia* (*Edonians*, *Bassarids*, *Young Men*, *Lykourgos*). Sommerstein (1996) lists ten other possible trilogies: one on material from the *Iliad*, another on the *Odyssey*, one about Ajax and the arms of Achilles, others on the encounter between Achilles and Memnon, the birth of Dionysos, the aftermath of the attack by the Seven on Thebes, the adventures of Jason, those of Perseus (with *Net-Haulers* as the satyr-drama), and the career of Telephos. As Aeschylus’ presentation in 472 consisted of four separate plays (including the extant *Persians*) and the three datable trilogies all are later than 472, one wonders whether the trilogy-form was a later development in his career. But it is more likely that in 472 his choice of *Persians*, a one-off drama based on recent historical events, dictated four separate plays that year.

A trilogy allowed the dramatist to depict events over three plays, to bring characters on stage in more than one drama, to pursue the consequences of actions beyond one drama. In the Theban plays and in *Oresteia* Aeschylus unfolds events over time, the former showing how curse and individual responsibility operated over three generations in the royal house at Thebes, the latter depicting both father and son in the same dilemma as well as the action and reaction of similar events. But the Iliadic trilogy, as reconstructed, covered only about two weeks and maintained a dramatic focus on Achilles, while the hypothetical trilogy about Ajax and the arms of Achilles may have covered over a few months. Both maintained a consistent setting in the Greek camp before Troy. Both *Oresteia* and the *Daughters of Danaos* seem to have employed a dramatic sequence of action-reaction-resolution, but not all trilogies need to have operated that way. Certainly the Theban-play displayed the successive doom of three generations, ending when the curse has finally run its course.

The Prometheus-plays

We need now to consider the Prometheus-plays attributed to Aeschylus. We possess a drama entitled *Prometheus Desmôtēs* (“Prometheus Bound”) and know that there was a second play called *Prometheus Lyomenos* (“The Release of Prometheus”), of which some fragments and a Latin translation by Cicero of a speech by Prometheus reveal that the chorus was composed of Titans freed by Zeus from their imprisonment and that Herakles, Prometheus’ eventual liberator, was a character. Two other Prometheus-plays are known: *Fire-Lighter*, which was the satyr-drama in 472, and *Fire-Bringer*. Two major problems must be considered: (1) whether this was a trilogy, and (2) the authorship of these plays.

§ Plays in capital letters are extant.

It is clear that *Prometheus Bound* and *The Release of Prometheus* form a sequence of two dramas, but is *Fire-Bringer* the third of a trilogy, and if so, is it the first or third play? The evidence for its existence is sparse: it is found in an incomplete catalogue of Aeschylus' plays, only one line survives (F 351), and an entry by an ancient commentator on *Prometheus Bound* records that "in *Fire-Bringer* . . . Prometheus was bound for three myriads [30,000 years]." It is unlikely to be the first play, since *Prometheus Bound* goes into great detail about what Prometheus has done and the significance of his gift to humanity – granted that the chorus do not know, but the accounts seem dramatically otiose if the audience had already witnessed the defiance of Prometheus and his theft of fire. If *Fire-Bringer* is not a first play, is it then the third play? But what need is there for a third play after Prometheus is freed? His release marks some sort of reconciliation with Zeus, and there does not seem to be much left over for a play called *Fire-Bringer*. The most economical explanation is that *Fire-Bringer* (*Pyrphoros*) is an alternative or a mistake for *Fire-Lighter* (*Pyrkaieus*), the satyr-drama that accompanied *Persians* in 472. The current consensus is that there were only two Prometheus-plays.

The ancient world assumed that the *Prometheus Bound* was by Aeschylus, but in the last century various scholars questioned the Aeschylean authorship, culminating with the thorough discussion by Griffith (1977), who concluded that the play (and with it *The Release of Prometheus*) was not by Aeschylus, but the work of a later tragedian, writing probably in the 430s. The arguments against Aeschylean authorship are both stylistic and conceptual. In the other six tragedies the chorus plays a crucial role, especially in *Suppliants* (50 percent of the lines) and *Agamemnon* (45 percent), and are vitally involved in their play, either as principals (*Suppliants*) or as setting the moral tone of the drama (*Agamemnon*). Yet in *Prometheus* they have about 16 percent of the lines and essentially fill the spaces between the episodes, although their early scene with Prometheus does give the spectators information about past events. This is the sort of chorus we get later in the fifth century. Technical matters of meter (the play's fondness for chanted anapests, certain rhythms in the choral odes) and language (e.g., the use of enjambment, allowing a sentence to run on into the following line) are also not in the Aeschylean style. At line 266 Prometheus declares, *hekōn, hekōn hēmarton* ("Knowingly I did wrong, knowingly"), which sounds like a commentary on Sokrates' dictum *oudeis hekōn hamartanei* ("no-one does wrong knowingly"), but Sokrates was thirteen years old when Aeschylus died. Finally the chorus seems to enter in a winged car (128–35), but the first probable use of the *mēchanē* was in 431 in *Medea*.

The other concern is the presentation of Zeus. In *Odyssey*, Hesiod, and the other plays of Aeschylus, Zeus is a god of order and Justice. Greek gods do not have to be kind – indeed at *Agamemnon* 182–3 the chorus declares, "grace (*charis*) comes with violence" – but they are not arbitrary and there does exist the powerful will of Zeus, "father of gods and men." In *Prometheus* Zeus is a newly enthroned tyrant (*tyrannis* and *tyrannos* are actually used at lines 10, 305, 756, 942), with all the harshness and arrogance associated with an arbitrary ruler. Defenders of Aeschylus' authorship often assume that Zeus changed during the course of the plays, pointing out that the Titans have been released, and that Zeus healed Io "with a touch" and fathered a son by her, whose line will culminate in the hero Herakles. To modern audiences the prequel

has become a standard feature of both novel and cinema and it should not present a real problem that we see in this play the early years of Zeus along with the possibility that Zeus may himself be displaced. Alternatively, in the second play Zeus may not have changed as much as come to terms with Prometheus, who knows by whom Zeus can be overthrown. On balance the different portrait of Zeus is neither a strong argument for nor against the authorship of Aeschylus.

If not by Aeschylus, the extant play certainly has Aeschylean features. There were at least two, if not three plays, in the production, and what we can tell of *The Release of Prometheus* suggests a progression with a resolution like that in *Oresteia* and *The Daughters of Danaos*. Io appears in the first play and her future journeys are foretold, while the future travels of Herakles, her descendant, are predicted in the second play. This is very much in the manner of the roles and dilemmas of Orestes and Agamemnon in *Oresteia*. Gods appeared on stage in the final play of *The Daughters of Danaos* and they dominate the stage in *Eumenides*; thus a play full of gods such as Prometheus is also in the Aeschylean style. As much about the play suggests a date in the 430s, critics have suggested that *Prometheus* was part of a posthumous production (in two or three plays) of material that Aeschylus had left unfinished at his death. We know from the **hypothesis** to Euripides' *Medea* that Aeschylus' son, Euphorion, won first prize at the Dionysia of 431, and Sommerstein's proposal (2010) that Euphorion won with the Prometheus-plays would explain Euphorion's victory, fit a date ca. 430 for *Prometheus*, and perhaps explain the revivals of Aeschylus that began by 425. The Athenian audience after twenty-five years missed Aeschylus.

The dramas of Aeschylus

The six datable plays all come from the latter part of Aeschylus' career (472–458), and we have no way of assessing what his early plays were like and how his concept and execution of drama changed over forty years in the theater. The first three (*Persians*, *Seven*, *Suppliants*) differ noticeably from *Oresteia* in a number of ways. None of the first three requires a *skēnē*-building nor any entries except through the *eisodoi*. The action takes place in the open with references to a city or a palace, but the *skēnē* and the central door so crucial to *Oresteia* are markedly absent. This is strong evidence that the *skēnē* was added about 460 – *Oresteia* may well be the first production with this in place. Similarly there is no hint of an *ekkyklēma*, which produces the incredibly dramatic scenes in *Agamemnon* and *Libation-Bearers*, where the murderer stands over the bodies of the victims.

The dramatic action of all three earlier plays requires two actors only and turns largely on the interaction between chorus and one character, such as the scene where the Queen asks the chorus about Athens in *Persians* or Danaos and his daughters plan their strategy in *Suppliants*. This is not to say that we do not get confrontations between characters – the messenger in *Seven* describes the enemy leaders and Eteokles dispatches an appropriate adversary – but on the whole the plays are “simple” rather than complicated. But in *Oresteia* the theater grows before our eyes, for while *Agamemnon* employs the chorus extensively with minimal interaction of the actors,

Libation-Bearers quickens the pace with short brisk scenes and uses a third actor with devastating effect when the silent Pylades breaks into speech at line 900 as the mouth-piece of Apollo. Finally *Eumenides* employs two changes of scene, a playing-area briefly empty of both chorus and actors, and fast-moving scenes. By line 240 we have had a prologue containing four separate scenes, while in *Agamemnon* we were still in the first choral *stasimon*.

A tragedy by Aeschylus was reasonably straightforward in structure, building from the opening dilemma to a climax at the end. Aristotle praises more complicated plays with “reversals and recognitions,” but there is little of that in Aeschylus’ earlier works. *Persians* begins with the chorus worrying over Xerxes and his great army in Greece, builds through the forebodings of the Queen, the disastrous news brought by the messenger, the oracular pronouncements of the dead king, and reaches its climax with the entry in despair of Xerxes – how the mighty have fallen! *Suppliants* opens with the arrival of Danaos and his daughters to their ancestral Argos, builds through the encounters with King Pelasgos and his decision to protect the suppliants, and concludes with the final confrontation between suppliants and their threatening cousins. *Agamemnon* follows this pattern, beginning with the misgivings of the watchman on the palace roof and rising to the climax of Agamemnon lying dead at his wife’s hands. But with the latter two plays of *Oresteia* complications are introduced. Who would have expected that the revenge of Orestes would involve Orestes’ old nurse and the unexpected intervention of Pylades or predict that the third play would switch from Delphi to Athens, involve a chorus of Furies, a trial at Athens, and reach a climax when the order of the cosmos is altered by a human court of justice?

Character in Aeschylus

Characters in Aeschylus are more important for their role and their actions rather than their personalities. The Greeks were not as fascinated by character and psychology as we are, although the plays do show instances of events explained by personality, especially in Euripides. Thus when Orestes at *Libation-Bearers* 247 describes himself and his sister as “the orphan offspring of the eagle-father,” we see them in their role as bereaved children rather than as fully delineated characters. In *Suppliants* we learn the King’s name, Pelasgos son of Palaichthon, but he is no real individual, rather the personification of his role as leader of his city. In *Seven* Eteokles takes on the dual role of shepherd of his people and the cursed son of Oedipus, but again we do not glimpse a complex character beneath the role he plays. The hatred that he shows for his brother (lines 653–76) is not motivated by personal feeling, but by loathing of his brother’s evil nature, “Justice never smiled on him.” The chorus begs him not to “show himself in passion like his brother of ill repute,” and although we do get hints of personal motivation, the scene has been so structured that his encounter with Polyneikes is not the result of personal vendetta but of his sober calculation of the defenders to be placed at the other gates. The only human to appear in *Prometheus* is Io, and she is more human victim rather than a woman with any individual characteristics. Aristotle and Northrop Frye would approve of Aeschylus’ characters.

To be sure Klytaimestra makes up for these other characters in low relief, the “man-plotting woman” whose motives are made clear at the end of *Agamemnon*: revenge for her daughter, the new man (Aigisthos) in her life, and spite over Kassandra, and, though not directly stated, gender jealousy – this woman has and enjoys power. Aeschylus probably breaks new dramatic ground by making Klytaimestra the chief perpetrator of the murder, and needs to build up for his audience this incredibly powerful portrait of the “woman-lioness.” Some minor characters also come alive with a distinctive personality, the watchman who opens *Oresteia* with his mysterious allusions couched in imagery, or the Nurse in *Libation-Bearers*, who reminisces about caring for the infant Orestes including washing his soiled nappies (734–65).

The chorus in Aeschylus

If characters in Aeschylus are for the most part drawn in low relief, his choruses stand out both for their dramatic personalities and their role within the play. In *Suppliants* the chorus speaks half the lines in the drama and it is their fate that it is on the line. These are no detached observers or ideal spectators, but critically threatened young women. In the scene with the King (234–523) we might have expected their father Danaos to conduct the negotiations, as one male authority-figure to another. In the previous scene (176–233) he has called attention to the advancing Argives and marshaled his daughters around the altar. But Danaos is silent for the rest of the scene, leaving the explanation and the formal supplication to the chorus. When Euripides writes his *Children of Herakles* with a similar dramatic setting, the male figure (Iolaos) speaks for a silent chorus. This chorus pleads their own case, although they are heavily influenced by their father, who has already arranged their escape from Egypt (11–18), prepared them for their encounter with the Argives, and at the end (996–1013) encourages them not to let their femininity attract men and to value honor over life. In the following play they will heed his instructions to kill their new husbands on their wedding night. The mythical tradition tells us that Danaos knows from an oracle that he will die at the hands of his son-in-law. This is not revealed in the play we have, but if it came out in the next, we have a chorus prepared to follow their father in whatever he says.

So opposed are they to this “impious” marriage (*asebēn*; line 9) with their cousins that they wish not to marry at all. They invoke virgin deities such as Artemis and Athene, and devoutly pray to have nothing to do with Aphrodite (“cowering with hatred for the marriage bed,” 332; “let the fate of death come before marriage,” 804–5). This is in ironic contrast to the songs they sing of their ancestress Io, whose suffering was healed by Zeus and the name of whose child (Epaphos) means “at a touch.” Their devotion to their father and their distaste for a forced marriage with their cousins have led them in this play to flee to a foreign land and in the next to murder these new bridegrooms. This is a chorus whose attitudes need to be made right. Someone at lines 1034–42 contradicts what the chorus has just sung and observes that Aphrodite is a god with power nearest to Zeus, along with Hera patron of marriage, and that she is honored by “awesome rites” (or “for her awesome

deeds"). There has been great debate whether this speaker is part of the chorus disagreeing with the other half, a sub-chorus of servants, or even the male Egyptians, perhaps led distinctively by Lynkeus, the one bridegroom who will be spared on the bloody wedding-night. The chorus in *Suppliants* then is a highly involved character in the play, one with a biased point of view that will have been changed by the end of the trilogy. Aeschylus presumably did not let his trilogy end with an unrepentant chorus guilty of the murder of their husbands.

The other highly involved chorus is that of *Eumenides*, where the Furies are more than observers but active participants in resolving the issue of Justice that Orestes' case has raised. These children of Night are frightfully described by the priestess of Apollo (lines 47–56):

I do not mean women, but Gorgons, though not like Gorgons either. I once saw a picture of creatures carrying away Phineus' meal [Harpies], but these had no wings and they were black, and completely loathsome. They snore with no gentle breaths and from their eyes drips an awful ooze and their dress is not right to wear to temples of gods or homes of men.

In the first part of the play they are completely unsympathetic, and the audience would probably side with Apollo in his rejection of them as little more than animals, whose home is more properly a lion's den. But surprisingly Athene does not reject them outright – "these too have their allotted place, one not to be rejected" (476–7) – and in the *stasimon* that follows we (and the ancient audience) realize that there is some Justice on the Furies' side:

It is good to behave properly through suffering. What man or what city of mortals can ever honor Justice if it has no fear in its heart? (520–5)

In the trial and judgment that follow the Furies have the better of the argument with Apollo and six of the twelve human jurors favor the case of the Furies. This is a brilliant piece of dramatic plotting, first to make these ancient and awful deities the actual chorus, and then to make them partly sympathetic to the audience.

But there is even more in store. In the last third of the drama, once Orestes has departed, Athene both threatens and persuades the Furies to abandon their announced vengeance on her city and to become honored residents therein. There were at Athens ancient guardian deities, called the *Semnai* ("the awesome ones"), and what Aeschylus has done is to identify these benign spirits with the Furies. In the closing chorus (1033–47) the children of Night are renamed the *Semnai theai* ("the awesome goddesses") and are given a home. Characters in *Oresteia* come home: Agamemnon to be murdered, Orestes first to kill his mother and now in *Eumenides* to be restored, and even the Furies can now speak of themselves as residents of Athens (916, 1018). The name "Eumenides" never occurs in the play. The term seems not to appear before the 410s, but essentially Aeschylus has turned the angry children of night into the awesome goddesses or the "kind ones," and in so doing has recast the Greek religious concept of these deities.

Other choruses in Aeschylus may not be so directly involved, but they do raise the level of the action from the particular to the general. In the first half of *Agamemnon* (1–781), the chorus sings an entry-song (40–103) and three long odes (104–257, 355–488, 681–781), in which they provide the background to the Trojan War (“so Zeus the god of guests and hosts sends the sons of Atreus against Paris,” 60–2) and Agamemnon’s part in it (“he dared to sacrifice his daughter, as the means to wage a war over a woman,” 224–6) and also the moral universe against which this story unfolds (“a man said that the gods did not care about punishing a mortal who would trample on things inviolable – that man was wrong,” 369–72; “Justice drives all things to their appointed end,” 780–1). Similarly in *Libation-Bearers* the chorus of servant women makes it clear that we are in the same moral universe (“what is there that can wash away blood fallen on the ground?” 48; “let Justice exact blood-stroke for blood-stroke – the doer shall suffer,” 312–13). The chorus joins Orestes and Elektra in a lengthy *kommos* (306–478), which widens the scope of the dramatic action and invokes the spirit of the dead Agamemnon. This chorus is not all-knowing, for they believe that Orestes’ act has wiped the slate clean (“you did well . . . you freed the entire city of Argos when you so neatly beheaded these two snakes,” 1044–7), but immediately on these lines Orestes sees the Furies and the cycle begins again. The old men in *Agamemnon* attempt to intervene in the action when they confront Aigisthos at line 1651, but more crucial is their appeal to Orestes at 1646–8 to come and be “the mighty murderer of these two” and again at 1667. Even more significant is the actual intervention by the chorus in *Libation-Bearers*, who at 770–3 instruct the Nurse to tell Aigisthos to come alone without his bodyguards.

So too in the earlier plays the chorus display to the audience the moral universe against which the on-stage action is set. The fugitive maidens in *Suppliants* make it clear that Zeus is the god behind the action of this play, both in his aspect as Zeus *hikesios* (“Zeus of suppliants”) and as their ultimate ancestor, who fathered Epaphos upon Io. This Zeus is in control of the moral universe, “from the lofty towers of their hopes he hurls murderous mortals; he wears no armor of violence, for everything for a god is without effort” (97–100), “with impartial scales Zeus examines both sides, dealing out evil to the wicked and good to the righteous” (402–4), “the Argives respect kindred suppliants of sacred Zeus, and so they shall please the gods with pure altars” (652–5). At the same time Zeus is their ancestor and in his healing of Io and his fathering of Epaphos the chorus seek a parallel for their own plight, ironically missing the point that Zeus and Io were reconciled by the very sexual relationship they are fleeing. The entire ode at 524–99 is devoted to the story of Zeus and Io – “in truth she bore the burden of Zeus and bore a perfect child, blessed through the greatness of time” (580–2).

The style of Aeschylus

Aeschylus as dramatist is probably best known through the caricature in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, and this may affect how we view his work. Aristophanes has “Euripides” accuse “Aeschylus” of using “words the size of a dozen oxen, with eyebrows and crests, terrifying and completely unknown to the spectators” (924–5), while “Aeschylus”

himself admits that lofty words reflect the scope of lofty dramatic themes and ideas, that “demigods should use more inflated language” (1059–60). Yet his iambic scenes, while grand, are not written in dense Greek – they often run smoothly and easily, with touches of the colloquial or commonplace (“an ox stands upon my tongue,” *Agamemnon* 39). Aeschylus is fond of the unusual word, often one that bears two meanings or that will recur throughout with loaded significance: such as *Agamemnon* 9 of Klytaimnestra, “such is the power of her confident man-plotting (*androboulon*) heart,” where *androboulon* could mean “plotting like a male” or “plotting against a male [or ‘husband’]” and in fact means both. Or at *Agamemnon* 525 the herald describes Agamemnon as “having brought down Troy with the mattock of justice-bringing (*dikēphoros*) Zeus,” where *dikēphoros* carries the theme of “the doer must pay, that is law” and will be used pointedly at *Libation-Bearers* 120 in contrast to *dikastēs* “judge.”

It is in the choral odes and the lyric exchanges that we see the grander and more opaque Greek. Aeschylus can pile up the adjectives, often compound ones, either minted by him or strongly in the tradition of high poetry, and the sequence of thought is often compressed. *Agamemnon* 218–27 shows the state of the king’s mind after he has decided to sacrifice his daughter:

But when he put on the harness of Necessity, breathing an impious, unholy, unsanctified turning of mind, then he changed to a dare-anything purpose. For delusion, evil-counseling, wretched, source of evils emboldens mortals. So he dared to become a sacrificer of a daughter, an arousal of woman-reprising war, the first offerings for his ships.

This is powerfully written, with three principal verbs in the past tense and the nouns “delusion” and “turning” each qualified by three adjectives, in the case of “turning” all negative compounds, with “delusion” described as “evil-counseling” and “source of evils.” Throw in “women-reprising war,” “dare-anything” (*pantotolmon*) and “first offerings” (*proteleia*), and one sees how Aeschylus’ language operates as high poetry. Aristophanes’ “Euripides” alleges that as the play unfolded, an Aeschylean chorus “would grind out four whole strings of uninterrupted lyrics” (*Frogs* 914–15). After the *parodos* in *Agamemnon* we have six pairs of such “uninterrupted” lyric *strophēs* and *antistrophēs* (104–257), in *Suppliants* eight pairs (40–175), and five such pairs in *Persians* (40–159).

One of the most distinctive features of Aeschylus’ style is his use of allusive and repeated imagery. It is rather like a leitmotif in an opera by Wagner, where the same musical phrase (e.g., Valhalla, Siegfried, the Valkyries) will suddenly come and go, directing the listener’s attention to the image that the phrase evokes. Image-patterns in Aeschylus are significant and carry much of the verbal meaning of the drama, and are varied with great skill, carrying shades of meaning from one passage to another. In *Oresteia*, the only complete trilogy that we possess, we have a wealth of such image-patterns: light and dark, animals, disease and cure, drops of liquids, hunting and the net. Pick any of these and the reader will find a complex pattern of verbal allusions and meanings. Take the eagle, a king’s bird, the creature of Zeus. At *Agamemnon* 48–59 the sons of Atreus are like plaintive eagles robbed of their young, whose cries the gods hear and send “a late-punishing Fury upon the transgressors.” Here the image

is favorable, but only fifty lines later, the sons of Atreus become a pair of eagles, who attack and devour a pregnant hare (109–20), an image which prefigures their destruction of Troy. Then in *Libation-Bearers* Orestes and Elektra become “the orphaned children of the eagle-father who died in the binding coils of the terrible serpent” (247–9). Similarly the snake-image shifts in its focus. Twice Klytaimestra in her murder of Agamemnon is compared to a female snake (a viper at *Agamemnon* 1233, an echidna at *Libation-Bearers* 249), appropriate given the association of snakes with the Mother. But then in her dream, related at *Libation-Bearers* 523–50, she gives birth to a male snake (*drakōn*, *ophis*), who is clearly Orestes (549). If, as for us, snakes carried negative overtones for the Greeks, a comparison of Orestes to a snake is not a happy one. Just to embellish the image further, the chorus will praise Orestes at *Libation-Bearers* 1046–7 for “freeing the whole city of Argos, by lopping off the heads of these two snakes (*drakontiōn*),” i.e. Klytaimestra and Aigisthos. In art Furies either have snakes for hair or hold a snake as they pursue Orestes – if so costumed in *Eumenides*, the spectators will see this image in reality – while at line 181 Apollo threatens them with his arrow, “a flying, biting snake (*ophis*).”

Aristotle (*Poetics* 6) lists *opsis* (“spectacle”) as one of the lesser parts of tragedy, more properly the realm of the technician than the poet. But grand visual aspect was a major feature of Aeschylus’ drama. Given the large scope of the ancient theater, physical movements would have to have been large and theatrical, and Aeschylus is fond of the tableau or the spectacular set scene. Aristophanes in *Frogs* had “Euripides” criticize the spectacle of the character silent for much of the play (911–20) – he mentions Niobe and Achilles (in *Phrygians*), but could have added Cassandra in *Agamemnon* – while Dionysos recalls (1028–9) the chorus mourning over the tomb of Dareios in *Persians*. We can only imagine the impression left on the spectators by the splendor of the Persian elders as they opened *Persians*, or the Egyptian-looking women who claim to be Greek in *Suppliants*, Elektra and the chorus gathered around the tomb of Agamemnon with Orestes and Pylades watching from concealment, or the chorus of Furies who burst through the doors of the *skēnē* and proceed to track Orestes down by the scent of blood on his hands, finally surrounding him at Athens and enchanting him with their song. Moments with the characters also come to mind: the watchman curled like a dog on the roof of the *skēnē*, Agamemnon walking the purple carpet to the door of the *skēnē* and to his death, Klytaimestra standing over her victims with the mirror scene from *Libation-Bearers*, or the figure of Athene presiding over the first murder trial in history.

Gender-themes in Aeschylus

In Aristophanes’ *Frogs* “Aeschylus” claims never to have brought a woman in love on stage (1044), but the actual Aeschylus makes great dramatic capital out of the theme of gender. One of the great figures in Western drama is Klytaimestra, the “man-plotting woman” who dominates all others in *Agamemnon*, who first persuades her husband to walk the carpet of blood and then murders him with a sword, whose first reaction to danger in *Libation-Bearers* is to demand a “man-killing axe” (889), and

whose angry ghost appears in *Eumenides* to arouse the Furies to their vengeance. In her description of the murder of Agamemnon (1385–92) she likens herself to the Earth impregnated by the life-giving rain, a chilling inversion of the ancient myth of the marriage of Earth and Heaven. It has been argued that in addition to revenge for her daughter, her love for Aigisthos, and jealousy of Cassandra, what really motivates her is gender-jealousy. Hers will be the man's role, and although she bares her breast to Orestes in the great confrontation between mother and son, we know from the Nurse that she never nursed the infant Orestes herself.

In the third play, *Eumenides*, the opposition between Furies and Olympians largely turns on gender, for the Furies are ancient, dark, and female, while the Olympians younger, shining, and male. This must have come through visually in the confrontation between Apollo and the Furies, especially if Apollo appeared on the roof of the *skēnē*, clad in light and armed with his bow to drive away these black-clad daughters of Night. The Furies deny all but the familial connection, and “treat as nothing the marriage-pledge of Zeus and Hera” (213–14). The trial will be presided over by Athene, a curious blend of female and male; dressed in man's armor, she declares herself “strongly for the father” (738), whether that means males in general, Agamemnon in this case, or as spokesman of her father Zeus. It is she that pronounces (739–40), “and so I will not put first the death of a wife who has killed her husband, the guardian of the house.” Yet like Klytaimestra, Athene is a woman of power, with male aspects and attitudes, played incidentally by the same actor, and feminist critics are right to react with unease over the distinction between the “man-plotting woman” and the goddess in male armor, who seems to be denying her own gender.

In *Suppliants* the relationship between male and female formed an important theme of the play, since at times the daughters of Danaos seem to be fleeing not just this marriage with the arrogant sons of Aigyptos, but all marriage (140–2, 342, 804–7, 1030–3). As we have seen, someone at 1034–42 tells the chorus that Love is a deity not to be rejected, and in a later play of the trilogy (*Daughters of Danaos*) Aphrodite herself proclaimed her role in the cosmos as the mediatrix of the union between the genders:

The holy sky yearns to pierce the Earth, and desire seizes Earth to join in union; the rain falls from the Sky's fluid abundance and makes Earth conceive, and for mortals she brings forth grazing for their flocks, corn for their sustenance, and the fruit of trees. From this wedlock of the rains come to birth all things that are; of this I am the cause (F 44),

the same myth that Klytaimestra blasphemes in her description of her husband's murder. As in *Oresteia*, harmony out of confrontation seems to have been achieved at the end, although the goddess presiding over this union of the sexes is Aphrodite rather than Athene.

Aeschylus' moral and divine universe

While Aeschylus was neither “theologian” nor “philosopher,” there is no denying that his tragedies operate within a crucial and consistent moral universe, as his

characters act and are acted upon in accordance with his view of the gods. "Religion" may be the wrong word to use since gods in Greek drama are not worshipped through faith in a being infinitely better than ourselves, but as realities in the universe who shape our ends and demand our worship. Gods exist, gods witness human actions, and gods punish wicked humans.

This is especially true of Zeus. In Homer's *Odyssey* (eighth century) and the poems of Hesiod (ca. 700–675), Zeus is the god in control of a divine order of Justice (*Dikē*). In the opening *stasimon* of *Suppliants* the chorus proclaims:

Destructive mortals he casts from the high tower of their hopes, he dons no armor of force. For the gods everything is without effort. Seated upon his holy throne he accomplishes his will. (96–103)

Aeschylus shows individuals who are responsible for their actions and ultimately for their punishment. In *Persians* the ghost of Dareios asserts what lies at the heart of Aeschylus' moral universe, the well-known sequence of *atē*–*hybris*–*nemesis*:

For when *hybris* (violent arrogance) blooms, it reaps the fruits of *atē* (folly), from which it gathers a harvest of tears . . . Zeus is present, the punisher of over-boastful minds, a heavy requiter. (821–2, 827–8)

A man's mental derangement (*atē*) may lead him to perform offensive acts (*hybris*), which lead to a reckoning (*nemesis*) presided over by the gods. Xerxes disregarded an oracle not to cross from Asia into Europe and yoked the sea as if it were a slave (740–50), and "when a man himself is eager, the god too lends a hand" (742). Agamemnon dared to sacrifice his daughter to get the winds that would take him to Troy and become a conqueror – at line 221 his mental state has changed to "one that would dare anything" – and the chorus proclaim at line 461–2 that "gods watch for those who kill many." Often in Aeschylus excessive prosperity or worldly success (*olbos*) lies at the heart of a man's ruin: the Persians with all their gold, Agamemnon who reduced a great city, the kings of Thebes whose prosperity was "too great" (*Seven* 771).

The predominant rhythm in *Oresteia* is action leading to reaction, and in the third play to resolution. Agamemnon is the agent of Zeus in the punishment of the Trojans for their violation of *xenia* (Paris' theft of another's wife) – "thus Zeus the powerful god of guests and hosts sends the sons of Atreus against Alexander" (60–2) – and at the same time the next victim in the cycle of *atē*–*hybris*–*nemesis*. His own wife will be his punisher, for motives that she outlines at *Agamemnon* 1431–47 (revenge for her daughter, influence of Aigisthos, jealousy over Cassandra), but she too will be Orestes' victim, when he is commanded by Apollo at *Libation-Bearers* 269–305 (and indirectly by Zeus: *Eumenides* 713) to murder his mother to avenge his father. The chorus expresses this in powerful and metaphoric language, "As Zeus remains on his throne this also remains – 'the one who has acted suffers' – for that is law" (*Agamemnon* 1563–4), "but it is law that blood-drops shed upon the ground call forth new blood, for the deed shouts for a Fury from those who died before, to bring another destruction upon destruction" (*Libation-Bearers* 400–4).

But Aeschylus is not writing morality-plays to justify the gods or to support a particular ethical stance. There are questions in his moral universe: if Apollo is the voice of Zeus, then did Zeus actually instruct Orestes to murder his mother (*Eumenides* 622–4)? Eteokles may be the victim of a curse working itself out in the third generation, but he is also the admirable defender of his city, who assigns the appropriate defender to each gate, leaving himself the seventh and his brother. The chorus at *Agamemnon* 160–83 (the so-called “Hymn to Zeus”) has only Zeus to call upon if they are to rid themselves of the burden of worry (165–6), yet admit that Zeus is the product of generational conflict among the gods and that the grace (*charis*) of the gods is also violent (*biaios*). Sometimes Zeus and the Furies seem to be working together in the pursuit of Justice (*Dikē*) – as at *Agamemnon* 55–9, 744–9, 1431–3, *Libation-Bearers* 646–51, but in *Eumenides* younger male Olympians and older female Furies collide. In this cosmic battle the shining young Apollo comes off poorly, while the powerful *stasimon* at 490–565 shows that the Furies are not without their place in the universe nor without the sympathy of humans. After all, six of Athene’s twelve human jurors voted for the Furies.

Gods are no strangers to the stage of Aeschylus. If *Prometheus* is his work, or even his concept completed by his son, all the characters but Io are divine figures, and the theme of the drama is the new tyranny of Zeus in Heaven and how he might be overthrown in turn. In the later Prometheus-play(s) it is likely that Earth and Herakles appeared, while in the *Daughters of Danaos* Aphrodite presented her role in the cosmos in terms of the archetypal myth of the marriage of Earth and Heaven. No gods appear in *Persians* or *Seven*, although the ghost of Dareios does provide an element of the supernatural and he does proclaim the moral truth about the universe and warn the Athenians and Greeks not to commit the offences that Xerxes has. In *Eumenides* divine beings dominate the stage, and although the trial is about the fate of Orestes, he is acquitted and off the stage by line 777, with nearly 300 lines of the play to run. The trilogy decides not just Orestes’ fate but the position of the Furies in the new Olympian order. This was Aeschylus’ bold dramatic stroke: the goddesses worshipped as Eumenides (“Kind Ones”) used to be Furies. If in the Christian universe devils are fallen angels, in Aeschylus the “awesome ones” (*Semnai*) are risen demons.

Gods appeared in the lost plays as well. Dionysos was a character in the *Edonians*, part of the tetralogy called the *Lykourgeia*, while the three plays *Semele*, *Wool-Carders*, and *Pentheus* may have formed a trilogy on Dionysos at Thebes, in which the god will have appeared both in disguise and in his own identity. We know also that Lyssa, the goddess of madness, was a character in *Wool-Carders* (F 169). In *Weighing of Souls* two goddesses, Eos (Dawn) and Thetis, come before Zeus to plead for their sons Memnon and Achilles in their upcoming combat. Thetis seems also to have appeared in *Daughters of Nereus*, bringing the new armor for her son Achilles. In *Niobe* the title character boasted that her children were fairer than Apollo and Artemis, and will pay the price for her arrogant tongue. A divine presence is very likely at either the start or the end of that lost play.

Oracles, ghosts, curses are all found in Aeschylean drama. Oracles underlie so much of Greek drama, and one of the major differences between our world-view and the Greeks is that for the latter oracles come true. Dareios comments at *Persians* 739

that “the fulfillment of the oracle came quickly,” and the chorus in *Seven* (742–91) makes it clear that the destruction wrought on three generations at Thebes began with Laios’ willful disobedience of a proclamation by Apollo:

three times Apollo spoke in his Pythian oracle at the centre of the Earth, that Laios would save his city by dying without offspring. (746–9)

In *Libation-Bearers* and *Eumenides* we hear of, then meet the god Apollo himself, as Orestes relates his oracle at 269–302, repeated by Pylades (900–2) as mouthpiece of Apollo, and confirmed by Apollo himself at *Eumenides* 84, 203, 579–80. The oracle to Danaos that he would die at the hands of a son-in-law is not mentioned explicitly in *Suppliants*, but would have made a nice dramatic revelation in a later play, and like all good oracles, would have come true in the end.

The modern reader or spectator often finds curses a convenient way to explain what happens to characters in Greek drama, especially those who seek the predestined workings of gods or Fate. But “Fate” is a word best avoided in the study of Greek tragedy. The Greek *moira* means really one’s lot or portion in life, while “Fate” suggests that the gods as puppeteers control every aspect of one’s life and denies any free will. Curses are part of Aeschylus’ moral universe, particularly in *Seven*, where the chorus sum up what has happened over three generations, “heavy are the reckonings of ancient-spoken curses, when they come due” (766–7). In this *stasimon* (720–91) we find the classic elements of an Aeschylean moral drama: excessive prosperity, mortal disobedience of a divine proclamation, the curse laid by Oedipus on his sons, which the chorus fears “a swift-footed Fury may fulfill.” Although Agamemnon’s is a house of blood, “god-hated, guilty, self-murderous place” (1090–1) wherein “dwells a parade of kindred Furies, aroused to even greater rage by drinking mortal blood, difficult to be rid of” (1188–90), and while Aigisthos may speak of the curse pronounced by Thyestes (1601–2), Agamemnon is not punished for what his father did to his brother and his nephews, but for what he himself has done: killing his daughter and destroying a city. It should be remembered that, while we know from lines 60–3 that Agamemnon is Zeus’ agent against the Trojans, he does not and cannot excuse himself that by sacrificing his daughter he is doing the will of the gods.

Aeschylus and his age

Aeschylus lived in interesting times. First there was the conflict with Persia. The Persians under Cyrus the Great first came into contact with the Greeks in the mid 540s, when the kingdom of Lydia in western Asia fell into Persian hands. By the end of the sixth century the Greek states in western Asia and the islands had become subject to Persian control. Certain of these states, led by Miletos, revolted from Persia in the early 490s, in what we call the “Ionian Revolt.” Although Athens as mother-city of the Ionians sent aid to the rebels, the revolt was crushed by the fall of Miletos in 494 – an event which inspired Phrynichos’ tragedy *Capture of Miletos* and its reception at Athens.

The Persians under Cyrus had already spread their influence across the narrow waterways that separate Asia from Europe into the regions to the north of Greece, Dareios reaching the Danube River in the 510s. But the Athenian aid sent to the Ionians gave Dareios and then his son Xerxes the excuse to launch major military campaigns against Greece, in particular against Athens. A sea-borne invasion in 492 was abandoned after a storm wrecked the Persian fleet at Mount Athos, and in 490 an expedition sent through the islands ended with the celebrated Athenian victory at Marathon. Aeschylus' brother is said to have died in that battle, while Aeschylus' epitaph records his own participation "which the long-haired Persian knew too well." Nine years later Xerxes mounted an immense invasion by land and sea (481–79), crossing the Hellespont and moving down from the north. This culminated in a decisive sea-victory for the Greeks at Salamis (480) and a land-victory the next year at Plataia. These permanently eliminated the Persian threat to Greece and dramatically altered the course of Western history. Aeschylus is said to have fought in the sea-battle and certainly the description that the Messenger in his *Persians* provides is preferred by historians to that given by Herodotos, a half-century later. First Phrynichos with his *Phoenician Women* (476) and then Aeschylus with his *Persians* (472) made drama out of the victory at Salamis and the repulsion of Persia. Aeschylus' play, however, while glorifying the Greek victory, showed the story from the Persian point of view and placed the Persians against the moral background of his tragic universe.

Next was the political sea-change from tyranny to democracy. When Aeschylus was born, Athens was ruled by Hippias the tyrant (*tyrannos*), a word which for us conjures up overtones of unenlightened despotism, but which for the Greeks at the time meant little more than "one-man rule." Peisistratos had seized power at Athens in the mid 540s and he and his son Hippias, who succeeded him in 527, ruled Athens more than competently until 510. Indeed in the fourth century the reign of the tyrants would be remembered as a golden age. Hippias was ousted from Athens in 510, principally by the agency of the Alkmaionidai, a prominent aristocratic clan who had enlisted the assistance of the oracle at Delphi and the Spartan army.

But the result was not the replacement of one-man-rule by an Alkmaionid oligarchy, but the establishment in 508/7 of *dēmokratia* (democracy), under the leadership of the Alkmaionid Kleisthenes, who, according to Herodotos, "took the people into his party." This was a limited democracy at first. The radical democracy, based on the crucial principles of *parrhēsia* ("freedom of speech") and *isonomia* ("equal laws"), that we associate with Athens did not really develop until the reforms of 462/1. At that time Athens broke off her alliance with Sparta, made a new alliance with Argos, and ostracized Kimon, the partisan of aristocratic and traditional politics. The Areopagos Council lost most of its political influence and returned to being a tribunal for homicide, and it is in 461 that many place the start of true democracy at Athens. The names associated with this change to radical democracy are Ephialtes, murdered in 461 by unknown agents, and **Perikles**, whose name is synonymous with the great age of democratic Athens.

As one would expect in plays written by and performed for Athenians, the democratic background seeps through. When in *Persians* the queen asks about Athens, "Who is the shepherd of this people and who commands their army?," she is told,

"They are called no man's slaves; they are not a subject people" (241–2), and in the account of the battle of Salamis the war-cry of the Greeks is "freedom" (403). But *Persians* is no paean to Athenian superiority, as the ghost of Dareios warns Athenians "not to lose their present good fortune through a craving for greater things" (824–6). In *Suppliants*, produced against the critical backdrop of the late 460s, the king of Argos maintains, "I would not attempt to make any promise until I have shared this matter with my citizens" (368–9) and Danaos describes at 600–24 how the decision was made in good democratic fashion, with the city voting to ally itself with the cause of right. If the traditional date of 463 for *Suppliants* is right, then this sentiment is being uttered at a time when Athens was redefining her structure of democracy.

No play is more bound up with current events than *Eumenides*. Whereas the earlier plays of the trilogy were set in the distant mythical past, *Eumenides* seems to move forward in time, almost to the present. Athene inaugurates what will become the Areopagos Council, a court of homicide, the same court whose extensive political powers were curtailed in the reforms of the late 460s. Contemporary events show through at three places. First is the significant change in foreign policy and the alliance with Argos. Aeschylus moved the traditional setting of the story of Agamemnon from Mycenae to Argos, and in the third play Orestes celebrates his acquittal by promising eternal friendship between Argos and Athens (754–77):

To this land and to its people for the great length of time to come, I swear this oath as
I take my leave: that no leader of my city will ever invade your land with hostile intent.
(763–6)

It does seem as if Aeschylus was presenting that treaty, made four years before, in an approving light.

More awkward is the matter of the Areopagos Council, for the play allows for a positive or negative spin on the reforms of 462/1. At 704–6 Athena formally establishes her tribunal:

I inaugurate this council, unaffected by thoughts of profits, a source of respect, quick to
anger, a watcher over those who sleep, the protector of the land.

One can argue either way: that Athene established this council as a court of homicide and all that the reformers did was strip away its political accretions and return it to its original function, or that Athene established this court and how dare reformers tamper with it in any way. Like all good artists, Aeschylus does not preach for one side of an issue, but leaves the matter open.

In the early 450s, Athens was perilously close to internal strife (*stasis*), this due to a combination of resentment over the change in foreign policy, the ostracism of Kimon and the political reforms, serious war losses in 459, and proposals to widen the basis for citizenship. Aeschylus in *Eumenides* displays an Athens where the citizens work together to avoid such faction, where "neither anarchy nor despotism rule" (696), where citizens "do not expel what terrifies from the city" (698), where the reformed Furies pray for "our city":

that civil strife (*stasis*), which never has its fill of evils, may never echo in this city, that the dust may never drink the black blood of citizens through a passion for retribution and blood-for-blood destruction and prey upon our city. May they exchange good things with common-loving hearts and love with one mind. For that is a cure for many things among mortals. (976–87)

This at a time when Athens was close to civil war.

Aeschylus lived during what we term the “Enlightenment,” the development of “philosophy,” which for a fifth-century Greek would include what we call “religion,” “science,” “philosophy,” and “ethics.” In the sixth century thinkers had begun to speculate *peri physeōs* (“about nature”). Xenophanes (ca. 500) had written poems in which he questioned the anthropomorphic presentation of gods, that is, gods like men. Herakleitos postulated a universe dominated by *logos* (“reason”), in which creation depends on four primal elements (earth, air, fire, water), the most important being fire. Parmenides explored in verse the nature of being, while Anaxagoras (in prose) proposed a universe run by Mind. In *Eumenides*, when Apollo proclaims that only the father is true parent of the child, he is likely uttering the arguments of Anaxagoras. The great age of philosophy lay ahead – Sokrates, Plato, Aristotle come later than Aeschylus – but Aeschylus did live among and did know the proponents of intelligent inquiry. It was an exciting time to have been alive.

Sophokles

The life of Sophokles (496–406) coincides almost exactly with the unfolding of the fifth century at Athens, the high classical period, which witnessed the wars with Persia and Sparta, the splendid building program on the Acropolis, the realization of the human ideal in sculpture, the development of the Athenian Empire, an acceleration in philosophy and science, the democracy for which Athens is famous today, and the high-water mark of Greek drama. For many Sophokles is tragedy’s representative in this century of perfection and elegance, a worthy companion to the Parthenon or the statues of Pheidias. For Sophokles our biographical information has more to do with his life outside the theater, since, unlike Aeschylus and Euripides, the dates of most of his surviving seven dramas remain uncertain. Again allowing for the inaccuracy of our sources and their fondness for anecdotes, we can establish the following list of dates with some confidence:

Sophokles’ Life and Career

- 496: born at Kolonos, near Athens; son of Sophilos
- 480: performed in the victory-song celebrating the battle of Salamis
- 468: début (with *Triptolemos*?) and first victory (over Aeschylus)
- 466–59: finished second (to Aeschylus’ *Daughters of Danaos* trilogy)
- 443/2: served as *Hellenotamias* (imperial treasurer)
- 441/0: served as elected general

- 438: first prize (defeated Euripides)
- 431: second prize (lost to Euphorion, Euripides third)
- 420/19: became guardian of the cult of the god Asklepios
- 413–411: served as *proboulos* in the emergency following the defeat at Sicily
- 409: first prize (plays included *Philoktetes*)
- 406/5: died at Athens
- 401: posthumous production of *Oedipus at Kolonos*

Anecdotes about his personal life are numerous. Ancient sources attest to his good birth – Ion of Chios uses the word *chrēstos* (“noble,” “decent”) of him – his attractiveness as a youth, and pleasing personality – and he will have received the usual aristocratic education in *mousikē* (learning) and *gymnastikē* (athletics). Unlike Aeschylus and Euripides, he had a public career. He held the office of *Hellenotamias* in 443/2, a treasurer of the goddess Athene, and two years later was elected as one of the ten generals, the highest elected officials in the state. According to Perikles, Sophokles was “a good poet, but a poor general,” and Ion of Chios describes his public career thus, “he was neither clever nor effective, but behaved like one of the nobles of old.” There are various stories about his time on active duty in the east, usually involving *la dolce vita* and sexual conquests. Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1419a25) tells us that after the disastrous loss of Athenian forces in Sicily in 413, Sophokles was one of the ten old men who held the new post of *proboulos*, created to provide confident leadership in troubled times. Aristotle adds that, when asked if the *probouloi* had consented to turn power over to the oligarchy we know as the “Four Hundred,” Sophokles agreed that they had, but could find no better alternative.

He is said also to have been the priest of a healing *hērōs* (Halon) and for that reason was entrusted with the cult statue (and sacred snake?) of the god Asklepios when his cult was being established at Athens after 420. Less certain is the tradition that following his death Sophokles was worshipped himself as a *hērōs* under the name Dexion. The stories about the unhappy relationship with his son, Iophon (himself a tragic poet), and the latter’s legal action against him for senility are just that, stories, perhaps derived from comedy. So too the various accounts of his death: from joy at winning the prize or by choking on a grape-seed.

According to tradition he was originally an actor in his own plays, but gave this up because of a weak voice, and thus became the first poet not to perform in his own plays. Aristotle credits him with the introduction of the third actor and of *skēnographia* (“scene-painting”). As Aeschylus employs the third actor in *Oresteia* (458), if Sophokles did introduce him, he must have done so early in his career. Three-actor scenes remain clumsy until the very end of the fifth century, when they are used with great dramatic effect in Euripides’ *Orestes* and Sophokles’ *Oedipus at Kolonos*. “Scene-painting” does not mean elaborate sets, but more likely that the front of the *skēnē* was rendered to look like a palace, house, temple or whatever, possibly by the addition of movable panels. He is credited with introducing Lydian and Phrygian musical modes into his choral songs, in addition to the basic **Dorian** and Ionian, and with increasing

the number of *choreutai* from twelve to fifteen. The *Suda* claims that he was the first to present four unconnected plays instead of a trilogy or tetralogy, but Aeschylus in fact did this in 472, four years before Sophokles' début. But as far as we know, Sophokles seems not to have used the trilogy form very much, if at all, and it is this which the ancient sources may have seized upon. He is said to have written a prose treatise *On the Chorus*, which might be genuine but could also be the result of a later work, in which Sophokles appeared in the first person (as do Aristophanes and **Agathon** in Plato's *Symposium*). Finally, according to a well-known citation by Plutarch (*Moralia* 79b),

Sophokles used to say that after he had experimented with the inflated style of Aeschylus and then with a harsh and artificial manner of his own composition, he had now adopted the third form of style, the one that is of the highest quality and best suited to the presentation of character.

Scholars have never been sure whether these stages are chronologically sequential as the phrasing suggests, or to which stages the seven plays we possess belong. *Ajax*, in particular, has been assigned by some to "the harsh and artificial style."

Ancient assessments of Sophokles almost unanimously praise him and his work. We have already mentioned Ion's description, *chrēstos* ("noble," "decent"), while Aristophanes describes as him "dipped in honey" at F 598 and as *eukolos* ("easy-going") at *Frogs* 82. That is why, explains Dionysos, he is going to bring back Euripides from the dead, because Sophokles is at home wherever he is, even in the underworld. At the same festival (405-L) a character in Phrynichos' comedy *Muses* comments (F 32):

A fortunate man was Sophokles: after a long life he died, happy and accomplished. After writing many fine tragedies he came to a happy end, enduring nothing that was evil.

The establishment of the canonical Three led some to approach Sophokles as a sort of Aristotelian middle as against the "extremes" of Aeschylus and Euripides. This is especially clear in the comparison of the three versions of *Philoktetes* by Dion of Prusa (ca. AD 100):

[Sophokles] seems to stand between the two others, since he has neither the ruggedness and simplicity of Aeschylus nor the cleverness and urbanity of Euripides. Yet he produces a poetry which is august and majestic, highly tragic and euphonious in its diction, with the result that there is the fullest pleasure combined with sublimity and stateliness.

We still do not understand fully *Peace* 695–7, where Sophokles is said "to have turned into Simonides." Since Simonides was notorious for hiring out his poetic skill, the point is presumably that Sophokles had written something for financial gain, but the actual details elude us.

The plays of Sophokles

The *Life of Sophokles* attributes to him 130 plays with the caveat that seven (or seventeen) are spurious, while the *Suda* gives a total of 123. Assuming that a total of about 120 plays is going to be in the right neighborhood, we may thus attribute to Sophokles about thirty or so productions over a career that lasted about sixty years. As we have seen with Aeschylus, a production about every other year seems the norm for a successful tragedian in the fifth century. His official total for victories at the Dionysia was an enviable eighteen; other sources say twenty or twenty-four. These may be taking into account victories at the **Lenaia** festival. We are told that he never finished worse than second. We know of victories in 468 (over Aeschylus) and 438 (over Euripides), and second-place finishes to Aeschylus' *Daughters of Danaos* (466–459) and to Aeschylus' son, Euphorion, in 431, perhaps with a posthumous work of his father. Incomprehensible to modern sensibilities is the statement by Dikaiarchos that the plays which included *Oedipus Tyrannos* finished second to Philokles.

A list of the known play-titles shows that his dramatic subjects ranged all over the canon of Greek myth. Like Aeschylus and Euripides, Sophokles found Troy and the events surrounding the war to be a fertile dramatic subject: (lost plays) *Ajax of Lokris*, *Ethiopians*, *Captive Women*, *Alexandros*, *Sons of Antenor*, *Gathering of the Achaeans*, *Wedding of Helen*, *Hermione*, *Eurypylos*, *Judgement*, *Lakonian Women*, *Laokoon*, *Nauplios*, *Odysseus Mad*, *Palamedes*, *Peleus*, *Shepherds*, *Polyxene*, *Priam*, *Sinon*, *Men of Skiros*, *Teukros*, *Troilos*, *Tyndareus*, *Philoktetes at Troy*, *Phrygians*, *Chryses*; (extant plays) *Ajax*, *Philoktetes*, *Elektra*. He seems to have avoided use of the trilogy format that Aeschylus found so amenable to his dramatic vision, although a fourth-century inscription does refer to a *Telepheia* ("The Story of Telephos") by Sophokles. Since the lost titles, *Sons of Aleos*, *Mysians*, *Telephos*, and *Eurypylos*, all seem to dramatize events in the life of Telephos, some have accepted that Sophokles wrote at least one trilogy, perhaps an early work.

Of the lost plays, we have several hundred lines of the satyr-drama *Trackers*, dealing with the events related in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, how on his first day of life the infant god Hermes invented the lyre and stole his brother Apollo's cattle. Sophokles' *Andromeda* was an early play (before 450) that made a visual impact, since at least half a dozen vases from the middle of the fifth century show Andromeda being bound on the shore. Few fragments of the play remain, with no hint of how Sophokles treated the story, which Euripides would present memorably in 412. Some have suggested that Sophokles' *Andromeda* was a satyr-drama, but would a satyr-drama have appealed so greatly to the vase-painters? Another disturbing and influential lost play was *Tereus*, which attracted comic attention in *Birds* and **Eupolis'** *Officers*. Over fifty lines of this play survive, and we know from later sources that the tragedy told the story of Tereus, a Thracian prince, married to an Athenian woman, Prokne. On a journey to fetch his wife's sister (Philomela), Tereus first raped Philomela and then cut out her tongue to prevent her from telling of his deed. But Philomela communicated her plight through weaving and the two sisters killed Tereus' son (Itys) and then served his flesh as food

to Tereus. At the end the gods intervene (F 589 is clearly spoken by a deity pronouncing judgment), by turning all the participants into birds (Tereus ~ a hoopoe; Prokne ~ nightingale; Philomela ~ swallow). If earlier than Euripides' *Medea* (431), *Tereus* could have influenced that powerful drama of a woman's revenge.

The seven plays that we possess come from about forty years of Sophokles' career – compare that to Aeschylus where the six certain tragedies come from the last decade and a half of his life. We have no way of knowing why these seven were preserved, although we may offer conjectures. *Oedipus Tyrannos* seems an obvious choice in view of its prominence in Aristotle's *Poetics* – Sophokles' treatment seems quickly to have become the “authorized version” of the story of Oedipus. *Antigone* also had a favorable reception in the ancient world; in fact the end of Aeschylus' *Seven* was rewritten to make it harmonize with Sophokles' play. *Oedipus at Kolonos* would soon have made up a third in an unofficial “Theban trilogy.” *Elektra* was chosen, we suspect, to accompany *Libation-Bearers* and Euripides' *Elektra* into the school texts, to provide the three different treatments of “Orestes' Revenge.” The treatise by Dion of Prusa (51) comparing the three versions of *Philoktetes* may have contributed to the choice of Sophokles' *Philoktetes*. But it is less easy to see why *Ajax*, interestingly enough the most popular play of Sophokles in the Renaissance, and *Trachinian Women*, were chosen, although both are powerful dramas depicting the death of a great physical hero. Perhaps the interest taken by the Stoic philosophers in the figure of Herakles as the model suffering hero played a role in the latter play's preservation.

With Aeschylus we can be reasonably certain when the extant plays were produced, the doubtful *Prometheus* excepted, and with Euripides we have eight secure dates and the other plays we can date within a year or two. But with Sophokles uncertainty rules. Only two dates are secure: *Philoktetes* in 409, and *Oedipus at Kolonos* in 401. As Sophokles died in 406, this last must be a posthumous production. Other dates are argued and supported by varying degrees of evidence.

Accepted Dates of Sophokles' Plays

early 440s: *Ajax*

443–448: *Antigone*

late 430s: *Trachinian Women*

early 420s: *Oedipus Tyrannos*

late 410s: *Elektra*

409: *Philoktetes* (secure)

401: *Oedipus at Kolonos* (secure)

Antigone is usually placed in the late 440s because of the statement in the *Life of Sophokles* that Sophokles owed his election as general in 441 to the success of his *Antigone*. As one of Euripides' rare victories belongs in 441, critics date *Antigone* to 443 or 442. A more recent interpretation downdates *Antigone* slightly to 438, when we know that Sophokles competed and won, and sees the mistreatment of the body of Polyneikes as reflecting the alleged treatment of Samian casualties in the war with

Samos (440/39). Sophokles may not have owed his election to the success of *Antigone*, but the anecdote does show that ancient sources dated that play about the time of the Samian War.

Some critics see *Ajax* as a clumsy drama structurally, falling into two parts: the death of Ajax and his redemption and burial, and regard this and certain remnants of the grand style of Aeschylus as evidence for an early date, usually the early 440s, although more recent criticism would put it in the 430s. *Trachinian Women* has been dated as early as 450, on the argument that Deianeira is something of an anti-Klytaimestra (*Oresteia* – 458). Both destroy a powerful husband, the latter through her assumption of the male identity and the former being consumed by a decidedly female concern to protect and preserve her marriage. We prefer a date in the 430s, close in time to *Oedipus Tyrannos* and the lost *Phaidra*, both of which turn on a dramatic hinge of good intentions gone horribly wrong. The evidence for the date of *Oedipus Tyrannos* is slender, a possible parody of Oedipus' discovery of the truth of the oracle at Aristophanes' *Knights* 1229–52 (424) and the attribution made of the plague at Thebes to the War-God (190–9). In the myth Thebes was not at war at this time, but Athens was from 431 onward and had suffered a devastating plague (Thucydides 2.50) from 430 until 426. If the mention of the War-God is an example of Athens' own background coming through into the play, it was thus produced in 429 or 427–425 (we know that Sophokles did not compete at the Dionysia of 428).

Finally for Sophokles' *Elektra* the question of the priority of the Euripidean or Sophoklean version is a vexed one, but we would favor a sequence: reproduction of *Oresteia* 425–420, Euripides' *Elektra* in 420 or 419, and then Sophokles' play as the latest of the three. The play shows signs of having been written late in Sophokles' career: the monody of Elektra at 85–120, the insertion of one scene within another, and the surprising variations on the normal plot-line (the false recognition-scene, and the actual recognition long delayed, the reversal of the murders). Thus any date from 418–407 is possible, with perhaps 413 as an attractive date, although with its shared focus on the use of deception and persuasively false arguments to achieve a desired end, it may have been one of the winning plays of 409 (along with *Philoktetes*).

Sophokles as dramatist

Unlike Aeschylus' trilogies, which often seem to have traced the workings of a curse, oracle or offense against the gods within a ruling family to its resolution, Sophoklean tragedies seldom end in such a manner. Rather, several of his dramas are open-ended, leaving the audience to ponder what happens next or, more precisely, inviting the audience to consider where his drama sits in relation to the parts of the story not dramatized. Herakles, undone by his wife's love and his own lust, departs to be placed on a pyre while yet alive, apparently dying unhonored by his father, Zeus, despite having lived his life in service to the gods. Is that the end of the matter? Is Hyllos correct in assuming that the gods really do not care about mortals, even their own progeny? Elektra has lived her life keeping the memory of her father alive through lamentation, living in anticipation of the return of her brother Orestes to avenge

Agamemnon's murder in the killing of Aigisthos and her own mother, Klytaimnestra. When at last her desires are on the point of being fulfilled and Orestes poised on the threshold of the house about to take Aigisthos inside to meet his death, the play ends. Will these vengeance-killings truly bring an end to sufferings of this house? By leaving his plays without a formal conclusion and inviting his audience to ask "what happens next?" Sophokles encourages them to consider what they have witnessed in the light of their knowledge of the myths upon which he has based his plays. This seems to have been the preferred dramatic ending for Sophokles.

Formally, however, a play by Sophokles seems to fit the assumptions which the student new to Greek drama tends to make about tragedy. It opens with an appropriate prologue, sometimes a single speech (as in *Trachinian Women*), sometimes a dialogue (as in *Antigone* or *Philoktetes*), sometimes with a two-part scene (as in *Oedipus at Kolonos* or *Trachinian Women*). The action proceeds with a series of strong encounters between pairs of characters, until a climactic moment is reached. These episodes are separated by formal choral songs that have some relevance to the dramatic situation. But unlike Aeschylus, Sophokles' dramas do not always end with the demise or the downfall of the principal character. In *Ajax*, the title character is dead by line 865, leaving his brother and the Greeks to sort out the honors due to him in death. *Antigone* is gone from our view at line 943, but her sentence of death will have its consequences: the arrival of Teiresias and his stunning denunciation of Kreon, the news of the deaths of *Antigone* and Haimon, and the final suicide of Kreon's wife in grief for her son. In *Trachinian Women*, the principal character is Deianeira, who rushes off to her death at line 812, but the suffering of Herakles, which she has unwittingly perpetrated, will dominate the rest of the play. In *Elektra* the formal climax, the death of Aigisthos, does not in fact happen during the action, but is left for the spectators' imagination, while in *Philoktetes* the plot-line takes unexpected twists and turns, with at least three moments at which the drama could reasonably conclude. *Oedipus Tyrannos* is the most straightforward, proceeding from ignorance to the horror of the full truth. It can fairly be considered the "first whodunit," since the action involves the investigation and solution of a murder.

Sophokles' technique becomes more complicated in the later plays that we possess, as the episodes become longer and more complex, with sub-scenes inserted into episodes or new episodes following without a choral break. Compare the straightforward structure of *Antigone*, to be dated around 440, with that of *Philoktetes* (firm date of 409):

<i>Antigone</i> (ca. 440)		
1–99	prologue	Antigone and Ismene
100–54	<i>parodos</i>	
155–331	episode 1	(i) Kreon and chorus [155–222] (ii) Kreon and guard [223–331]
332–75	first <i>stasimon</i>	
376–581	episode 2	(i) Kreon and guard [376–446] (ii) Kreon and Antigone [447–530] (iii) Kreon, Ismene and Antigone [531–81]

582–625	second <i>stasimon</i>	
626–780	episode 3	Kreon and Haimon
781–800	third <i>stasimon</i>	
801–82	<i>kommos</i>	Antigone and chorus
883–943	episode 4	Antigone and Kreon
944–87	fourth <i>stasimon</i>	
988–1114	episode 5	Kreon and Teiresias
1115–54	fifth <i>stasimon</i>	
1155–1353	episode 6	(i) Messenger, Eurydike and chorus [1155–1260] (ii) Messenger, Kreon and chorus [1261–1353]

Philoktetes (409)

1–134	prologue	Odysseus and Neoptolemos
135–219	lyric dialogue	chorus and Neoptolemos
220–675	episode 1	(i) Philoktetes and Neoptolemos [220–541] [chorus at 391–402, 507–518] (ii) Merchant, Philoktetes, Neoptolemos [542–627] (iii) Philoktetes and Neoptolemos [628–75]
676–729	first <i>stasimon</i>	
730–1080	episode 2	(i) Philoktetes and Neoptolemos [731–826] (ii) chorus and Neoptolemos [827–64] – second <i>stasimon</i> (iii) Philoktetes and Neoptolemos [865–974] (iv) Odysseus, Philoktetes, Neoptolemos [975–1080]
1081–1217	<i>kommos</i> and lyric dialogue	Philoktetes and chorus
1218–1471	episode 3	(i) Neoptolemos and Odysseus [1218–62] (ii) Philoktetes and Neoptolemos [1263–1408] (iii) Herakles, Philoktetes, Neoptolemos [1409–71]

We note at once the longer and more complicated episodes: the merchant-scene, which brings an important halt to the action (542–627), inserted into the larger encounter between the young man and Philoktetes; and the reduced role of the chorus, given only two formal *stasima* in the play. Two places where we might have had a choral song in an earlier play are replaced with lyric dialogue between the chorus and a character (135–219, 1081–1217). *Philoktetes* is certainly a virtuoso piece for the actors, as both protagonist and deuteragonist play one role only – compare *Ajax* where the protagonist plays first Ajax and then his brother Teukros, and the astonishing situation in *Trachinian Women*, in which the lead actor plays both the insecure and timid Deianeira and then her monstrous husband Herakles. A glance at the structure of *Elektra* (very probably late) and the posthumously produced *Oedipus at Kolonos* (401) show similar bold departures from the earlier sort of dramatic structure.

We have remarked before on Aristotle's relegation of spectacle (*opsis*) to a place below that of both plot and character as criteria of good drama. Aeschylus would create dramatically set scenes laden with significance for the watching spectators. Sophokles' use of spectacle is not nearly so grand, and thus less easy to detect, apart perhaps from the spectacle of the bound maiden in the lost *Andromeda*. But there are places where a more subtle visual style can be seen. Ajax falls on his sword in plain view of the audience, a sight which must have been both shocking and disturbing for the audience, since violent acts usually take place off stage and are reported by messengers. This must take place near an exit (an *eisodos* or the central door), so that the actor playing Ajax may vanish to re-appear as Teukros, but a dummy or stage-double will remain, indicative of how this larger-than-life hero still dominates the stage after his death and will remain in full sight until the end of the play. In *Oedipus at Kolonos* Antigone helps an aged and infirm Oedipus into the grove of the Furies where he will take his seat at line 201, not to stir until line 1544, when he leaves confidently under his own power. This must have been a moving visual moment, for this blind man no longer needs his human guide.

When objects are used in the Greek theater, they are usually significant, perhaps none more so than the bow of Herakles in *Philoktetes*. The Trojan prophet has foretold that Troy will fall only to the man wielding this bow, and in the play we see it first in the hands of Philoktetes as the symbol of survival, then entrusted to and subsequently stolen by Neoptolemos, its loss lamented by Philoktetes, and finally restored to him. The changing fortunes of the play are symbolized by the movements of this bow. Or consider the empty urn in Sophokles' *Elektra*. At line 1097 Orestes enters carrying what are supposed to be "the small remains of the dead man in this little urn" (1113–14). But we know what Elektra does not, that there is nothing in that urn and that the real Orestes stands before us holding a fiction. More than one critic has seen metatheater at work here, a symbol of the whole fictive nature of the genre, but even on the dramatic level, it symbolizes the essential lie at the heart of this play, recalling Apollo's injunction "with guile to hide murder done by a righteous hand" (37). In *Trachinian Women* the poisoned robe will have a crucial visual role, first as it is brought out and sent off to Herakles (598–632) and then when it returns on the body of Herakles whom its poison is now consuming (1046–1111). Or consider the sword of Ajax, mentioned at line 10, surely in his hand when he enters at line 91, and described by Ajax as "the most hated of weapons" (658) and "the gift from Hektor, the foe I hated the most" (817–18). He will plant this in the earth and fall upon it before the eyes of the spectators.

Two other visual moments may be considered. One comes after the prologue in *Antigone*, in which two women have entered from the *skēnē*, but only one (Ismene) will return to the safety and controlled world of the palace. Antigone will venture even further into public space and leave by the *eisodos* that leads to the world outside the city, eventually to the realm of the dead. The other comes after the crucial scene in *Oedipus Tyrannos* (1110–85), wherein Oedipus learns the truth about his parentage from the Theban herdsman and the messenger from Corinth. Imagine the scene as observed by a spectator looking down upon the *orchēstra*, as Oedipus walks slowly through the *skēnē*-door into his palace, as the herdsman leaves by the one *eisodos* and

the messenger by the other. The playing-area has thus become a place where three roads meet.

Sophokles and dramatic character

Aristotle maintained that drama is about “doing” not “being,” that one can have a tragedy without (idiosyncratic) character, but not without plot. But all seven of Sophokles’ surviving plays portray an important central character, around whom the tragedy unfolds. These are often “lonely” people, set apart from their fellow humans: Philoktetes literally so on his deserted island, Deianeira driven from her home and abandoned by her husband, Ajax in isolation in his tent on the shore, Antigone and Elektra unsupported even by their sisters, and certainly the blind and accursed Oedipus whom all shun in *Oedipus at Kolonos*. Ironically the one character who is not isolated as the play opens is Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, although he does possess the distance that one would expect of a king and savior of his city. But by the end he will become a man apart, unclean and sightless, whom no one will envy.

In Sophokles it seems that greatness brings an equal measure of suffering, that these larger-than-life heroes somehow attract the lightning of tragedy. The chorus sing at *Oedipus Tyrannos* 873, that “being a tyrant breeds arrogance,” and this has been seen by some as the underlying theme of a Sophoklean play. Ajax is the great warrior among the Greeks, but when he is not awarded the armor of Achilles, his sense of honor leads him to attempt to kill the Greek leaders, and then to take his own life in shame. He operates in the traditional Greek moral ethos of “do good to your friends [*philoî*] and harm to your enemies [*echthroî*],” and is now out of touch with the realities of a newer world, where the humanism of Odysseus fits better – “his excellence counts more to me than his hatred” (1357). *Oedipus Tyrannos* shows us the great king and savior of his people, whose prime motivations are to rescue his state once again and to learn the truth. The irony of this play is that his relentless pursuit of the truth leads him to discover more than he anticipated, and that this truth is discovered (and the state thus saved) by Oedipus’ good qualities. While we do see his hot-headedness and a dash of political paranoia in the scenes with Teiresias and Kreon, these do not lead to his downfall in any sort of sequence of cause and effect.

In her play Antigone stands opposed to the recent decree of her uncle Kreon which would deny burial to her brother Polyneikes. Claiming deepest affection (*philia*) for her brother and equally deep respect for the divine laws which demand burial of the dead, she willingly contravenes her uncle’s edict, knowing that the penalty for doing so is death. Kreon, now ruler of Thebes, seeks to preserve the hard-won safety of the city by imposing order, which for him entails treating his nephew as the traitor he proved to be, and making an example of him to the citizens of Thebes. This is not a play with one protagonist, rather there are two: Kreon, rather like the “hero” of an Aeschylean play who brings his disaster upon himself, and Antigone who goes to her death lamenting that she suffers “for respecting what deserved respect,” an innocent victim where the laws of the gods are concerned (see her crucial speech at 450–70).

Even Deianeira, who may be the most timid of tragic principals, operates in this way. Here is a mortal woman whose exceptional beauty has attracted the attention of a god, a human hero, and a monster, and this much to her sorrow, as she herself makes plain in her opening speech: “for I sat there stricken with fear that my beauty might devise some pain for me.” This is no Helen, “sent by Zeus as a Fury for brides,” but an exemplary wife, wholly devoted to her husband, tolerant of his extra-marital affairs and of his long absences from home, whose effort to preserve her marriage will lead to her own death and that of Herakles.

These main characters are “heroic” in the sense that they are larger than life and given to their own excellence (Ajax: physical heroism, Oedipus: intellectual strength, Deianeira: wifely devotion and beauty, Philoktetes: survival with honor and dignity, Antigone: devotion to her family, Kreon: devotion to the state). But their excellence often makes them difficult for the spectators to relate to. Modern readers frequently find the secondary figures more appealing: Odysseus in *Ajax*, Neoptolemos in *Philoktetes* (who can steal the show, if the actor playing Philoktetes is not careful), Theseus in *Oedipus at Kolonos*, Ismene in *Antigone*, and Chrysothemis in *Elektra*. Characters in the plays do admire these larger-than-life figures. Odysseus at *Ajax* 1340 calls Ajax “the best of the Achaeans, even though he was my enemy”; the priest regards Oedipus as the “first of men” (*Oedipus Tyrannos* 33), and Hyllos tells his mother that she has killed “the best man on the earth.” But they are not entirely comfortable with them either. Modern sentiments may regard Antigone sympathetically as a proto-feminist martyr, or as one who takes the cause of the gods against the decrees of men, or whose individual conscience prevails over the tyranny of the community, but it is unlikely that she appeared as sympathetic to her fifth-century audience. She was a woman who has usurped the male’s responsibility to arrange a funeral, invaded the public space and challenged Kreon both as the ruler of the city and as her *kyrios* (“lord,” “male guardian”). Teiresias does say that Kreon was mistaken (1064–71), but he never says that Antigone was right, and the chorus, observing her words and actions, make the evaluative judgment that she has “the fierce disposition of a daughter of a fierce father” (471–2).

This last comment highlights an important aspect of Sophokles’ approach to characterization. In a number of his plays he exploits the common belief that a child inherits their father’s characteristics, not merely physical similarities, but also temperament. If the father is rash, easily angered, lacking in self-control, so too will be his son, or, as in Antigone’s case, his daughter. Ajax assumes that his young son, though only a toddler, will not be frightened by the sight of his bloodied father “if he is truly my son” (547) and that, when grown, “you will show what kind of son of what kind of father you are” (556–7). In *Philoktetes* all the main characters assume that Neoptolemos is his father’s son, and this contributes to the complication of the plot.

For this reason perhaps Sophokles’ plays only hint at psychological motivations. But a modern reader wants to know about Antigone’s relationship with Polyneikes, why she is so insistent on his burial, whether there is anything incestuous about her desire “to lie beside him, dear one (*philos*) by dear one” (73), or whether she has something of a “martyr complex.” It could be argued that Sophokles does at least provide an answer to the first two questions when he has Antigone state that her

“nature is to join not in enmity but in love” (523). In contrast, Ismene is also given a loving nature, but she has not inherited the “fierce disposition” to carry out the task. For Sophokles it is the issue that matters: that even a traitor to his city is a brother and, in keeping with divine law, deserves the rites of burial by his family. To dramatize this issue he has given us two characters, Antigone and Kreon, who are well-matched in their temperaments, each of whom though related to the deceased, responds to their responsibility to Polyneikes, the family, and the city differently.

In *Elektra* we encounter Sophokles’ other dynamic female protagonist, who actively and doggedly seeks justice by keeping the memory of her father’s murder alive through public lamentation. The issue driving this play’s plot is thus the long-delayed execution of justice. But unlike Antigone, Elektra does not (initially) contemplate satisfying the claims of justice herself, but awaits the arrival of her brother Orestes. Although Elektra characterizes herself as a “woman of noble birth” (257) and claims that her very nobility is what drives her to continual passionate lamentation, Sophokles also introduces the idea that one’s nature can be distorted by circumstances, that in extraordinary times of crisis loyalty to one’s paternal line and a deep commitment to see justice done can become oppressive and a matter of shame rather than honor. He also, perhaps for the first time, suggests that even a noble nature can be corrupted through teaching and example.

Sophokles gives us a title character who is obsessed with her situation, who like Antigone is found outdoors, who depends on one prop to keep her going: that her brother will come and avenge their father. Then the dramatist knocks that prop out from under her and we observe first her determination to do the deed herself and then her joy in the return of her brother. One wonders what sort of life is left for Elektra, who “has been waiting without marriage, without children” (164–5). When Klytaimnestra declares at 784–5 that Elektra “lived with me drinking the unmixed blood of my life,” we realize that there have been Furies in this play after all – Elektra has taken on herself the vengeful vindictiveness of the avenging ones. In a bold dramatic stroke Sophokles has Elektra direct and mime in full view of the spectators the murder of her mother inside the palace by Orestes.

Philoktetes is the other Sophoklean play that ends “happily,” with the title character finally persuaded to rejoin the Greeks at Troy and bring the city down. Like Ajax, he is a hero of the old school, deeply wedded to the principle that one should return good for good, harm for harm. Betrayed first by the Greeks and (to his way of thinking) even by the gods and thereafter by Neoptolemos, his refusal to modify this position stands in the way of realizing his salvation and future glory. But it takes the intervention of the deified Herakles to overcome his resistance. Against this traditional hero are set the arch-strategist and master of persuasion, Odysseus, who has boasted to the army that he will retrieve Philoktetes and the bow by any means necessary, and his young assistant, Neoptolemos, son of noble Achilles, who is clearly concerned with his own reputation. In this play one’s nature (*physis*), especially that of Neoptolemos, is of paramount importance, as this young man is asked to behave in a manner which is contrary to his own nature in order to take Philoktetes’ bow for the Greeks. His character is so drawn that there remains some doubt as to whether nature has truly triumphed over education at play’s end.

A comment by the author of the *Life of Sophokles* shows that Aristotle's emphasis on the primacy of plot over character was not shared by all ancient authorities:

He [Sophokles] knows how to arrange the action with such a sense of timing that he creates a character out of a mere half-line or single expression. That is essential in poetry: to delineate character or feelings.

Some of these instant assessments would include Oedipus' definitive declaration just before the truth is revealed, "but I must hear" (*Oedipus Tyrannos* 1170), Antigone's self-declaration at line 544, "I do not love a loved one (*phile*) who loves [only] in words," and Philoktetes' address to Neoptolemos, whom he has previously called "child" or "son of Achilles," "what have you done to me, *stranger?*" (923).

The chorus in Sophokles

Just in terms of the number of lines, the choral role in Sophokles differs markedly from that in Aeschylus. In the six certain tragedies by Aeschylus, the chorus has between 30 and 50 percent of the lines in the play, and in two plays (*Suppliants*, *Eumenides*) is intimately involved in the action. But in Sophokles the chorus has barely more than 20 percent of the lines, nor do we get the extended *stasima* with many pairs of *strophēs* and *antistrophēs*. In *Antigone*, for instance, the choral pattern is:

<i>parodos</i>	55 lines	2 strophic pairs
<i>stasimon</i> 1	44 lines	2 strophic pairs
<i>stasimon</i> 2	44 lines	2 strophic pairs
<i>stasimon</i> 3	20 lines	1 strophic pair
<i>stasimon</i> 4	44 lines	2 strophic pairs
<i>stasimon</i> 5	38 lines	2 strophic pairs
<i>kommos</i> (with Antigone)	19 lines	2 strophic pairs

Compare this with the three opening choral odes from *Agamemnon*, *Suppliants* and *Persians*, each over a hundred lines with six, eight, and five strophic pairs respectively.

In the later plays the choral role diminishes further. In *Elektra* and *Philoktetes* they are virtually invisible and not very necessary to the drama:

Elektra:

<i>kommos</i>	50 lines	3 strophic pairs
<i>stasimon</i> 1	42 lines	1 strophic pair + epode
<i>stasimon</i> 2	40 lines	2 strophic pairs
<i>stasimon</i> 3	14 lines	1 strophic pair

Philoktetes:

<i>kommos</i>	50 lines	2 strophic pairs
interludes	22 lines	1 strophic pair (divided)
<i>stasimon</i> 1	54 lines	2 strophic pairs
<i>stasimon</i> 2	34 lines	1 strophic pair + epode
<i>kommos</i>	20 lines	2 strophic pairs
	20 lines	1 strophic pair

In both plays the opening song is replaced by a *kommos* with a character, which in fact becomes the chorus' largest piece in the drama, and the number of *stasima* is reduced significantly. The regular pattern of episodes separated by choral songs is all but gone.

Sophokles' choruses are not as intimately involved in the dramatic situation as they are in Aeschylus. They are observers rather than participants, although in *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, and *Ajax* they have more than a passing interest in the situation and it can be argued that in all the plays their well-being is placed in jeopardy to some degree by the protagonists. Thus in *Antigone* their opening song celebrates the departure of the enemy, but they soon discover that their new ruler may himself be a threat to the city's safety. In *Oedipus Tyrannos* they are the voice of the plague-ridden city, whose salvation is placed in the hands of their present ruler, and in *Ajax* they are the justifiably worried military companions of their doomed leader. In *Elektra* and *Philoktetes* their role is reduced to engaging with the characters in the formal *kommos*, although even here either as women living under the tyranny of Aigisthos or as a contingent of Greek sailors seeking victory at Troy, their futures will be affected by the success or failure of the action.

In *Oedipus Tyrannos* Sophokles shows us a meditative chorus reacting to and reflecting upon the events as they unfold:

***Oedipus Tyrannos*: Choruses**

151–215: What does the oracle mean?; the plague at Thebes; appeal to the gods.

463–511: What does Teiresias mean?; the public record of Oedipus; "I do not know what to say."

863–910: The power of the gods is great; is Oedipus behaving as a tyrant?; if oracles and Apollo are not honored, what is the point of worship?

1086–1109: Oedipus may be the child of a god.

1186–1222: "I do not envy mortals at all"; Oedipus defeated the Sphinx and became "the Great." but now "who is more wretched than he?"

1524–30: "Call no man happy until he is dead."

In each ode they pick up on something that has gone before in the previous episode, and explore two repeated themes: the role of the gods and the responsibility of mortals for their actions. In the crucial fourth *stasimon* (1186–1222) they lift the situation from

the particular to the general (“with your fate, unhappy Oedipus, as an example, I do not envy mortals at all,” 1193–5). Their immediate reaction is not to the disaster that has personally befallen Oedipus, but to the fate of humanity in general.

The chorus is thematically strong also in *Trachinian Women*, especially in the choral ode at 497–530. The god beneath the text of this drama is Eros, not so much Love as Lust, and in this tragedy the line between human and the bestial is very blurred – the Greek *thēros* (“beast,” “monster”) is used of both the centaur and the river-god. In this ode the chorus sings of the contest between Herakles and the river-god in the form of a bull, fighting for the beautiful maiden, “like a wandering calf, strayed from its mother.” In the chorus’ first ode (96–140) they compare Deianeira to a “wretched bird” (105), and at the end declare that they have never seen Zeus “without a plan for his children” (139–40), a neat bit of ring composition, since the play ends with the denunciation, “and there is none of these things that is not Zeus” (1278).

Aristotle’s definitive statement (*Poetics* 1456a25–30) on the chorus is well known:

The chorus too must be regarded as one of the actors. It must be part of the whole and share in the action, not as in Euripides but as in Sophokles. In the others the choral odes have no more to do with the plot than with any other tragedy. And so they sing interludes, a practice begun by Agathon.

It is not exactly clear what “as in Euripides” or “as in Sophokles” means, but his following comment implies that choral odes should have some relevance to the tragedy. Some regard the chorus in Sophokles as an “ideal spectator,” but they are more than a microcosm of the audience, and perhaps “reflective participants” is better, as they do have a share and a stake in the story, and they do allow the dramatist to express how some might react to what goes on before them. The chorus is not the dramatist himself teaching a message to the audience, for choruses can be misled (as in *Trachinian Women* 660–2), puzzled (as at *Oedipus Tyrannos* 463–511), hostile (*Oedipus at Kolonos* 229–26), and supportive of deceit (*Philoktetes* 828–64). Reinhardt (1979: 82) described the chorus in *Antigone*: “like groups of people standing on the bank and following with their eyes someone who is being snatched away by the current. This is how the chorus stands in safety and watches, participating, but outside.” But at times the choruses of Sophokles have their feet in the water as well.

Irony in Sophokles

Irony, both dramatic and tragic, lies at the very heart of Sophokles’ dramas. Dramatic irony depends on knowledge, the spectators’ awareness of the true state of affairs against which the unknowing statements of the characters will resonate with powerful effect. Tragic irony is realized by both audience and characters when a character’s well-intentioned actions produce wholly unanticipated and typically negative results. Sophokles is the master of both, not just the dramatic one-liners for which *Oedipus Tyrannos* is so famous, but larger situations which are permeated with irony. Oedipus, the most gifted of mortals in intelligence, the first syllables (*oidi-*) of whose name mean

“know,” does not even know who his parents are. The man who saved his city from the Sphinx is himself the pollution of that city. What brings about the revelation of the truth are his good qualities, not his faults. Herakles, the slayer of beasts and monsters, is brought down, not by a warrior male or creature of the wild, but by the timid wife whom he despises. The situation in Kreon’s Thebes is so out of kilter – cf. Teiresias’ words at 1064–90 – that it requires a woman to cross the gender line and put things right in the civic sphere. When Kreon finally realizes the truth, he heeds the chorus’ advice at lines 1100–1 to release the maiden and bury the body, but does so in the wrong order. Even when he does the right thing, he gets it wrong. Philoktetes, whom the Greeks rejected, is now found to be the chief cornerstone of their success at Troy.

We get ironies of particular scenes and moments, especially prevalent in *Oedipus Tyrannos*. The blind Teiresias is the only one “who sees what the god Apollo sees,” and when Oedipus finally “sees” the truth, his impulse is to blind himself. Jokaste attempts to rid Oedipus of his fear of oracles by telling him of her own experience with oracles, and in so doing leads him to discover the first truth: that he is the murderer that he himself has cursed. Kreon has denied any intention of wanting to be king (583–615), but in fact comes to power by the end of the play. The Corinthian messenger in his attempt to relieve Oedipus of the fear of committing incest (1016) drives the final nail into Oedipus’ coffin. Perhaps the ultimate irony comes when Oedipus asks the herdsman why he did not kill the child and hears “because I pitied it.” *Oedipus Tyrannos* is the great play of good intentions gone horribly wrong, and the irony of this situation carries much of the power that the play still possesses.

In *Elektra* we have the irony of deceit, for we know from the prologue that Orestes will send the old man to the palace with an empty urn and a false story that Orestes is dead. Because the irony operates through human deceit rather than the larger workings of the universe, we feel this irony less powerfully, but still with some force when Orestes attempts to take the urn from his sister at 1205–15. Sophokles has so cleverly structured this play that when Chrysothemis returns at line 871 with the news that someone has left a lock of hair at Agamemnon’s tomb, Elektra will have been misled into drawing the wrong conclusion. The recognition-scene in Aeschylus’ *Libation-Bearers* was played upon by both Euripides (*Elektra* 487–584), who all but parodies the simplicity of Aeschylus, and here by Sophokles, who accepts the tradition, but ironically has the truth denied.

Oedipus Tyrannos is the play where dramatic irony operates most abundantly. Dramatic irony depends on knowledge, and in a play like *Philoktetes*, where the spectators do not know what happens next, irony cannot work as effectively. But we know the story of Oedipus and so can respond appropriately. Thus Oedipus declares prophetically, “there is not one of you that is as sick as I myself” (60–1), states definitely, “I know of Laios only at second hand, I never laid eyes upon him” (105), swears that “if he [the murderer] lives in my home with my knowledge, I pray that I myself may feel my curse” (249–51), and in words that never fail to elicit a shudder affirms, “I fight for Laios as if he were my father” (264–5). We feel that we are watching events unfold against a larger backdrop, that these ironic statements are terrifying and at the same time appropriate.

Antigone may not have been as familiar a dramatic theme – Sophokles himself may be largely responsible for developing this plot-line – but at least twice in his opening scene Kreon can stir the audience with irony: first at line 220, “there is no-one so foolish as to be in love with death,” but we have seen Antigone say precisely that at lines 69–97; and then at line 248, when informed of the burial of the body, “who was the man who dared this?,” using the gender-specific word *anēr* (“male”). We know from the prologue that the perpetrator was not male.

Finally in *Trachinian Women*, because we know that Herakles died by his wife’s misguided actions and that monsters bearing gifts cannot be trusted, we can appreciate the subtle ironies of the tragedy. The monster that Herakles killed to claim his bride will through her connivance finally bring him down. For fifth-century Greeks the centaur was a metaphor for unbridled male lust, and it is fitting, ironically so, that what destroys Herakles is a symbol of his own sexuality (“one man, Herakles, has loved so many women,” 460). Further irony lies in the manner of Deianeira’s death by the sword, a man’s method of committing suicide – women usually hang themselves or take poison. Finally at line 576–7 is one of Sophokles’ deliciously ironic lines: the words of the dying centaur instructing Deianeira to dye her robe in his blood and create a love charm, “so that he will never look at and love another woman again.”

Twice in Sophokles’ extant plays a woman prays to Apollo for divine assistance in situations where we know that their prayers will not be answered. First at *Elektra* 634–59 Klytaimnestra after her first exchange with her estranged daughter prays to Apollo for a happy end to her situation:

Grant that I may live always with my life safe, ruling the house of Atreus and wielding this sceptre, loving the dear ones with whom I now live, enjoying my life and with those of my children who do not hate me or afford me bitter pain.

Ironically her prayer will apparently be answered immediately at line 660, when the old man arrives to announce the “death” of Orestes, but we know that this is a ruse to gain her confidence and admission to the palace. At *Oedipus Tyrannos* 911–23 Jokaste enters and announces that she is making offerings at the temples of the gods for a happy resolution of the prospect that Oedipus might in fact be the murderer of Laios. Here the spectators see her approach the altar of Apollo praying that “you may provide us with a clear solution.” This is ironic in three senses, first because in the previous scene she has denied the power of Apollo’s oracles, second because we know that it will be in vain, and third because the entry of the Corinthian messenger will for a moment seem as if her prayers have been answered (“prophecies of the gods, where are you now?,” 946–7).

Buxton (1985) sees irony as not just a dramatic technique, effective as it may be at rousing a shudder from the spectators, but something “that is at the very heart of his perception of experience.” Human beings think that they know something or have confidence in some state of affairs, but Sophokles’ dramas will demonstrate that this confidence is built on a foundation of sand. For Winnington-Ingram (1980: 329) irony is essential to Sophokles’ view of the universe. Gods know the truth, but are

above events, while it is humans who must live and act in this flawed world of disharmony.

Sophokles' divine and moral universe

Perhaps because the moral and divine universe in which Sophokles places his characters is not so clearly delineated as that of Aeschylus, students of Sophokles tend to make the man's universe reflect his own perceived character. Sophokles was *eukolos* ("easy to get along with"), he was *chrēstos* ("noble"), he was pious (witness the stories of his devotion to the gods of healing). Phrynichos (F 32) called him a "truly happy man, who wrote many fine tragedies, and died never having experienced a moment of pain." It is argued, then, that such a "nice" man must have seen the universe as a "nice" place and created his tragedies accordingly against an optimistic background. Gods in Sophokles must represent a morally and ethically better order, and if tragedy occurs, it must be the fault of humans who sin and then are punished. This view was especially prevalent when *hamartia* in *Poetics* 13 was mistranslated as "tragic flaw," thus turning these plays into tragedies of crime and punishment.

But why should we extrapolate from the author to his or her works? We might invoke the "Amadeus principle" here, for in Peter Shaffer's play the character of Mozart admits, "I may be a vulgar man, but my music is not." Indeed much of that play and film depends on an antithesis between the personality of the artist and his artistic expression. The English composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams, was viewed personally as an attractive and sympathetic person, and his harsh and angular *Fourth Symphony* (1935) took his listeners and fans by surprise, as it seemed at odds with their expectations of the man himself. We need to be careful of regarding Sophokles as a serene optimist or Euripides as the dramatic rebel.

Critics approach Sophokles in one of four ways generally. First are those whom we may call the "pietists," who take the line developed above that Sophokles must be presenting an optimistic universe, that he is living up to the title of *didaskalos* ("teacher") which the poets bore, and that his tragedies will end with some sort of optimistic closure or resolution. What stands out about the dramas of Sophokles are his larger-than-life heroes, about whom the action revolves and whose greatness somehow attracts disaster. For the pietists these heroes are lacking in *sophrosynē* ("moderation"), their behavior crosses the line and incurs a tragic result. Both playwright and spectator are expected to disapprove of this lack of moderation. Thus Ajax is too bound up with his sense of honor and his physical heroism, Oedipus with his intellectual confidence, Philoktetes with his hatred of the Greeks.

The problem with this approach is that it requires a divine benevolence and human shortcomings which the gods observe and punish. Antigone, a typically Sophoklean isolated hero, suffers for doing what was right in the eyes of the gods (and many anonymous citizens) – these are her last words in the play – and if Philoktetes goes too far at any point in the play, it is only at the end where he refuses the persuasive appeal of Neoptolemos with its revelation of the gods' delayed benevolence to the long-suffering hero. Winnington-Ingram (1980: 325) makes the good point that

Aeschylus' solution to the ongoing cycle of action and reaction in the universe was the persuasion of the Furies, but in Sophokles' late plays persuasion fails to work and the result is more disaster. Additionally, contrary to the pietists' view, none of Sophokles' surviving plays achieves an uncomplicated, optimistic closure or resolution.

The second view takes the opposite tack, that the heroes are truly that, heroes, and that the fault lies with the divine background. The gods fail to save Antigone, who did what was right, Oedipus does nothing wrong in the play – in fact his good qualities bring about the revelation and the ultimate tragedy. Athene not only drives Ajax mad, but she invites his mortal enemy (Odysseus) to laugh at him. Hyllos concludes *Trachinian Women* with an indictment of the gods which we might properly associate with Euripides ("and there is none of these things which is not Zeus"). On this view Sophokles has inherited the divine framework from traditional myth, but elevates his main characters to a level of "heroic humanism" (to borrow the phrase from Whitman 1951), culminating in the splendid ode from *Antigone*, "there are many wonders in the world, but nothing more wonderful than a human" (332–83).

But Sophokles' heroes are not always comfortable to be with, nor are they wholly admirable, nor do we get the idea that we are to emulate these examples. Antigone is her stubborn father's daughter – a predominantly fifth-century male audience would likely regard her with some sympathy, but with even more distaste. For many Ajax is just too violent and honor-bound; he may have been a tribal hero of the Athenians, but one who belonged in a Homeric epic rather than contemporary society. Oedipus in *Oedipus at Kolonos* may achieve heroic status at the end, but we watch him becoming more and more angry – heroes in Greek cult are traditionally angry beings – and condemning his sons to death. Neither the desperate and love-starved Deianeira or the unfeeling and violent Herakles are any models of human heroism.

In reaction to these attempts to discern a consistent moral universe, a third group of critics has turned its attention to Sophokles' plays as effective and powerful drama, rejecting or playing down a didactic element in his work. Aristotle (*Poetics* chapter 6) maintains that the end of tragedy is the arousal of pity and fear, pity for those who do not deserve their fate and fear for those like ourselves. Critics such as Waldock (1951), Stanford (1983), Heath (1987), and Griffin (1998) stress the emotional and entertaining power of tragedy and Sophokles' ability to create new and exciting plot-lines (especially in *Elektra* and *Philoktetes*). "There is religion in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* but it is not crucial in the drama" (Waldock 1951: 167); "the chief interest of poet and audience in tragedy was in its emotive force, and in the pleasure which accompanies the emotional response which that force can evoke" (Heath 1987: 207). In a landmark article which should be required reading for all students of Sophokles, Dodds (1966) advances and dismisses various interpretations ("heresies") of the *Oedipus Tyrannos*, regarding this last view with some sympathy, but ultimately concludes that there must be some "meaning" in the *Oedipus*.

A more recent trend regards the universe of Sophokles as profoundly disturbing. The pleasure Athene takes in the humiliation of Ajax is troubling as is her expectation that Odysseus will share in her enjoyment. Antigone is essentially innocent, for she defends the unwritten laws of the gods (as against human decrees) and goes to her

death for respecting what deserved respect. Yet she is not a sympathetic martyr; she has the impatience and intransigence of her father, and had she not taken her own life, would have been released from her prison. Philoktetes can be abandoned to ten years of pain and suffering and then be expected readily to rejoin those who abandoned him because the gods are ready to let Troy fall. Oedipus can be allowed to share his mother's bed for an extended period of time, sufficient to produce four children, before being impelled by divinely created circumstances to discover the truth of his horrific situation.

Elektra has provided critics with a wealth of possible interpretations: a return to the values of the Homeric story, a satisfying achievement of a deserved revenge, or a deeply ironic play where the avengers are less than sympathetic. Orestes can be seen as the exemplar of the conscienceless young men who would mount two anti-democratic coups in Athens, Elektra as a Fury personified, who has lived for only one thing: vengeance, and the play will end with Aigisthos foretelling future woes for the house of Atreus. Yet, disturbing as this is, Orestes acts with the approval of Olympos and under the direction of Apollo.

Perhaps the most disturbing comment on the world-order in Sophokles comes at the end of *Trachinian Women*, where we have seen a desperate wife, abandoned by her husband, attempt to win him back by resorting to a love-charm that goes fatally awry. Herakles, the greatest of human heroes, is brought down by the woman he has rejected and a monster that he has killed, and is left to die in agony on the pyre. The end of this play is profoundly disturbing, not just in the entry of Herakles in agony, but in his unfeeling request to his son to light the pyre that will kill him and then to take Iole to wife, the young woman who has been the cause of the tragedy, and especially in Hyllos' words that close the play:

Companions, lift him up, showing your great sympathy to me over this and realizing the great unkindness of the gods over the events that have happened here – these gods who are our parents and are called our fathers watch such sufferings. No-one sees the future, but the present is pitiful for us and shameful for them, and especially hard on him who endures this disaster. Maidens, do not stay in this house, where you have seen new and recent deaths and many woes beyond precedent. And of these there is not one of these things that is not Zeus.

It is tempting to see Sophokles' characters as mere pawns of the gods rather than free agents. We are left with the impression that no matter what they do, they will eventually fulfill the prophetic word that hangs over their lives. This is what is often termed "fate" in Sophokles, wrongly so because the ancient audience would not have viewed these plays as discreet tales about a particular person.

For many of the characters who become tragedy's protagonists the end of their story was already well established in the mythical corpus. Herakles had met his death on a pyre while still alive; Oedipus did discover that he was his father's killer and his mother's husband; Philoktetes did take part in the fall of Troy. In the case of Oedipus, mythical tradition had long held that his father Laios had received an oracle that he would die at the hands of his son, if he had one. Even without an oracle in the background, tradition held that Ajax did die by his own hand, that Orestes did avenge his

father by killing Aigisthos (if not always his mother) and that Polyneikes and Eteokles did perish at each others' hand. Sophokles, like the other tragedians, set about to show the "how" behind the established event.

Sophokles and the polis

We have seen that Aeschylus' plays, at least the ones that we possess, are very much involved with the concept of the *polis* and with democratic Athens in particular. *Persians*, *Suppliants*, and *Eumenides* have strong links with the political situation in Athens of the time. These connections are far easier to spot when we either know or can be reasonably sure about each play's production date. Such is not the case with Sophokles' plays, where we begin from known events in the Athenian political sphere and attempt to correlate them with a possible production date of a play, on the assumption that what was happening in Athens when a play was being composed may have influenced the shape and content of a play. Thus, as we have already noted, the alleged atrocities committed against the Samian prisoners in the war with Samos (440/39) may have been reflected in the controversy at the heart of *Antigone* over the burial of the dead. However, *Ajax* raises this concern as well and it is often considered an earlier play than *Antigone* on other grounds. For *Oedipus Tyrannos* the plague which ravished Athens in the early years of the **Peloponnesian War** has been used to date the play sometime between 429 and 425, because the plague afflicting Thebes is said to have been brought by the War-God (190–9) and Thebes is not on a war-footing in the play. In the political climate in which *Elektra* was most likely performed, the misuse of persuasive rhetoric in the assembly had become a major problem. In 411 the oligarchs employed such rhetoric to persuade the members of the *probouloi* to suspend the democracy in the interest of the city's preservation. They promised to re-institute a less inclusive council of Five Thousand once the crisis had passed, but this apparently was never their true intention. Thus when Orestes observes that it is fine to misuse words if it wins the advantage (59–60), his statement may well have served as a stark reminder of current political turmoil at Athens. When we further recognize that the issue underlying *Elektra*'s call for vengeance against her father's murderer(s) is located in who truly has the right to rule, it becomes clear that the "political" is not absent from this play, even though it is addressed through the familial problems within Atreus' bloodline. *Philoktetes*, produced in 409 and thus shortly after the restoration of democracy, is also deeply concerned with the misuse of persuasive rhetoric even for apparently noble ends.

On the basis of his extant tragedies, it would appear that Sophokles wove the political issues of his day into the fabric of his plays far more subtly than either Aeschylus or Euripides. Often his tragedies address an ethical dilemma that could arise in any political community: when personal and communal needs are at odds, which should take precedence? Both *Philoktetes* and *Ajax* present such a dilemma with protagonists who have been harmed by the army's leadership and seek to harm them in return. But if either were to get his way, the whole army would suffer as well. Does the

situation justify using cruel deception to overcome Philoktetes' resistance? Does Ajax' mutinous intent against the leadership justify their refusal to grant him burial after his suicide in the name of re-establishing order in the ranks?

From another perspective we find that in several of Sophokles' plays what begins as an action to address a political problem subtly shifts into an action based on individual concerns. In *Antigone*, Kreon attempts to present himself as a fair and just ruler by issuing an edict against the burial of his own nephew, Polyneikes, whom he views as a traitor; however, in the face of unexpected opposition, his concern for the city's well-being gradually becomes concern for the preservation of his authority to rule as he sees fit. In *Oedipus Tyrannos* Oedipus' noble determination to save the city by finding the murderer of the previous ruler becomes a very personal quest, first to find sure evidence that *he* is not the murderer and then to solve the mystery of his birth. In the process the salvation of the city is all but forgotten. When Oedipus insists that he be exiled from the city at play's end, is it for the sake of the city's salvation, of which there is no mention, or an expression of his own shame and his self-loathing?

Each of these four plays involves problems of leadership and decision-making, where very personal concerns are allowed to unduly influence a leader's decisions. For two of Agamemnon's children in *Elektra*, the dead Agamemnon is both deposed king and murdered father and Aigisthos a usurper to both political and familial leadership. However, while the play contains two significant symbols that support Orestes' right to rule – the scepter and sprouting tree in Klytimestra's dream (417–23) and Agamemnon's signet ring as recognition token (1223–24) – it also presents the manner in which he regains the throne as deeply problematic: Orestes equates what is advantageous for himself personally with what is (morally) right generally. Are there not shades of a potential for inherited rule to become just as tyrannical as that of a usurper's such as Aigisthos?

In *Oedipus at Kolonos* interstate relations become an issue in a play where the reception and protection of a suppliant whose polluted state and family-ties to Thebes are potential threats to the city of Athens. Should Athens be willing to accept any and all suppliants? Should it be willing to risk war over their protection? On a more general level Thebes has been recognized as a sort of anti-Athens in tragedy, a city where men might marry their mother, curse their children, and gouge their eyes out. Thus in tragedy, when Thebes and Athens interact (as here in *Oedipus at Kolonos* or in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*), a pointed contrast is to be made between the two, with Athens (unsurprisingly) emerging as the more just and better governed city.

But Sophokles' dramas do not engage just with the narrowly political issues such as leadership and law-making, but both represent and subvert the normal statuses and activities assigned to men and women in Athenian society. His female characters are daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives concerned primarily with domestic and familial matters. In *Antigone* and *Elektra* appropriate female attitudes and behaviors are set in opposition to the inappropriate ones displayed by the title characters. Ismene, sister to Antigone, and Chrysothemis, sister to Elektra, each accept their subservient status and caution their respective sisters against pursuing or continuing their ultimately

self-destructive activities. In *Oedipus at Kolonos* the contrast is maintained between Antigone, who has gone into exile with her father, and Ismene, who has remained in Thebes. Although Oedipus acknowledges Ismene as a dutiful daughter when she brings them news of an impending threat to their lives, she has been content to remain under the guardianship of her brother and her contact with them during their long wandering has been minimal. In other plays (*Trachinian Women*, *Ajax*, *Oedipus Tyrannos*) the females involved are married women or their equivalent, Tekmessa being technically Ajax's concubine, who are especially interested in preserving their families. Jokaste attempts to comfort Oedipus' anxieties by questioning the reliability of oracles; Deianeira attempts to preserve her marriage and her status as Herakles' wife by employing a love-charm to turn his desire back toward her; Tekmessa pleads with Ajax to forego his intended suicide in order to remain alive as protector of their family, especially of his son. These concerns are wholly in keeping with expectations of loyal wives, although none of them succeeds in achieving that goal.

By contrast, Sophokles' male characters have more varied roles beyond their status as sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands. They are frequently rulers or military leaders, figures charged with the responsibility of keeping the city or the army safe, of preserving and maintaining order. Part of that order entails keeping women in their place. Men like Kreon and Ajax are particularly concerned that women not even attempt, let alone be allowed, to direct a man's decisions. Kreon explicitly states that he will not be "ruled by a woman" (525); Ajax calls Tekmessa a fool if she thinks she can instruct him (594–5). At a decisive moment Oedipus, too, rejects the advice of Jokaste (1060–72), even though he had deferred to her direction earlier in the play. It is perhaps another irony in Sophokles' tragedies that, in hindsight, taking the advice proffered by these women could have averted the male protagonist's death or extreme suffering. But it is in adhering to appropriately manly attitudes and modes of behavior in the process of carrying out their political responsibilities that Sophokles' male protagonists often bring disaster upon themselves and those dear to them.

Sophoklean tragedy promotes readers and theater-goers to think about how things might have turned out otherwise, to debate how the suffering or the fatal tragedy might have been avoided. What could have been done differently? At what stage in the action did things begin to move in the wrong direction? Or in keeping with Aristotle's concept of *hamartia*, what error was made? Some would argue that the poet, as *didaskalos*, taught by setting before his audience honorable men (and occasionally women) whose choice or action, made with the best of intentions, proved harmful rather than beneficial to themselves and others. Although in most cases these figures were kings or tyrants of other Greek cities in the distant past, they were much like the majority of the audience, men charged with the responsibility of governing and preserving their city. Whether the political system under which they lived was a democracy or an oligarchy, each had a group of citizens charged with directing their city's affairs. If at the end of Sophokles' emotionally engaging tragedies, some of the spectators were stimulated to discuss and debate what they had witnessed along similar lines to those which engage us, Sophokles might well be deemed the most politically engaging of the Big Three.

Euripides

Both ancient and modern critics regard Euripides as the unconventional and even iconoclastic dramatist, a reputation which the evidence does in part support. Ancient sources provide all sorts of anecdotes about Euripides, mainly based on “deductions” from material in his plays or from the caricature in comedy. We have a *Life of Euripides*, no more reliable than the other ancient *Lives*, a briefer entry in the *Suda* (ε 3695), fragments of an anecdotal dialogue by Satyros (third century), a chapter in Aulus Gellius’ *Attic Nights* (15.20) from the first century ad, and a summary of his life by Thomas Magister (fourteenth century AD). Allowing for the fictions and exaggerations of the ancient sources, we can provide the following biographical scheme with reasonable confidence:

Euripides’ Life and Career

- 480: Born to Mnesarchides and Kleito; from the deme of Phlya.
- 455: First tragic production (included *Daughters of Pelias*).
- 447–444: Competed against Sophokles and Achaïos.
- 441: Victory at the Dionysia.
- 438: Finished second to Sophokles, with *Cretan Women*, *Alkmaion in Psophis*, *Telephos*, *Alkestis*.
- 431: Finished third to Euphorion and Sophokles, with *Medea*, *Philoktetes*, *Diktys*, *Harvesters*.
- 428: Victory over Iophon and Ion at the Dionysia, with second *Hippolytos*.
- 415: Finished second to Xenokles, with *Alexandros*, *Palamedes*, *Trojan Women*, *Sisyphos*.
- 412: Production of *Helen* and *Andromeda*.
- 408: Production of *Orestes*.
- 408: Visit to the court of king Archelaos of Macedon.
- 407: Death in Macedon.
- ca. 405: Posthumous victory through his son, with *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, *Alkmaion in Corinth*, *Bacchae*.

Most of the anecdotes surrounding the life and career of Euripides are the products of comic caricature and scholarly invention. That his mother sold green vegetables in the market is a repeated joke in comedy (*Acharnians* 478, *Women at the Thesmophoria* 387, *Frogs* 840), the exact truth of which eludes us still. He is said to have lived in splendid isolation in a cave on Salamis – this too may have come from comedy – and to have possessed a library. Plutarch (*Alkibiades* 11) records that he composed an ode for Alkibiades’ victory in the chariot-race at Olympia and on a darker note an elegy on the Athenian dead in the Sicilian campaign (415–413). Plutarch (*Nikias* 29) adds that many Athenian captives in that campaign won their freedom by reciting for their theater-mad captors recent choral odes by Euripides. His private life was allegedly not

a happy one, for he is said to have divorced his first wife for having an affair with his friend Kephisophon, who also supposedly co-authored his plays. The following is a classic instance of how the poet's work became incorporated into his own biography: "They say that after he had married Choirile, the daughter of Mnesilochos and had witnessed her immoral behavior, he wrote his first *Hippolytos*, in which he trumpets the shamelessness of women, and then divorced her" (*Life of Euripides* 24).

One would like to know if the stories about Euripides' close association with the philosophers have any validity. Vitruvius (first century AD) called him "pupil of Anaxagoras" and "philosopher of the theater." Protagoras is said to have read his treatise *On the Gods* in the house of Euripides – this may just be a collocation of two infamous fifth-century thinkers about the gods. But most often he is connected with Sokrates, as fellow-thinker and even inspiration (Aristophanes F 392):

This [Sokrates] is the man who writes those clever and chatty plays for Euripides.

The two would have much in common: an inquiring and critical intelligence, an unwillingness to accept conventional answers, and a rejection of that which was specious and blatantly self-seeking. Some have seen in Euripides' *Medea* a dramatic character challenging the Socratic dictum, "no-one does wrong knowingly," when *Medea* admits (1078–80) that her *thymos* ("passion") is overpowering her rational deliberations (*bouleumata*):

I understand what sort of evil deeds I am contemplating, but my passion is stronger than my reason – passion is responsible for the greatest evils for mortal men.

It is said that Sokrates would attend the theater especially if Euripides was performing, and would make the trip to see his plays at the Peiraieus theater.

Euripides' début is traditionally set in 455, one of the plays being *Daughters of Pelias*, although it seems suspiciously convenient that the canonical third begins his career the very next year after Aeschylus' death in 456. If the designation in the hypothesis of *Alkestis* (438) of that play as "seventeenth" is chronological – it can certainly not be alphabetical – then allowing for three missing satyr-titles, the production of 438 would have been Euripides' fifth in eighteen years, rather a slow start to his career. A début about ten years later ca. 445 might make more sense. But twenty-two productions over his traditional career of forty-eight years (455–407) amounts to an average of every other year, a figure which we have seen fits the careers of Sophokles and Aeschylus. Perhaps Euripides' career was late in developing and he may not have reached his stride until the 420s. Aristophanes' comedy shows Aeschylus and Sophokles already established in their canonical status and Euripides in the process of becoming a "great" poet. In fact Euripides may have Aristophanes to thank for advancing his status among the Athenians of his day.

Ancient sources tell us that in 408 Euripides moved to the court of Archelaos, king of Macedon, a semi-Greek kingdom in the north. Archelaos was attempting to establish a cultured court-life in his kingdom, and we know that the tragic poet Agathon, Timotheos the poet, and the painter Zeuxis were also present at the court. Why would

Euripides, now in his seventies, leave Athens for the wilds of northern Greece? A recent unsuccessful outing at the Dionysia? One of his plays of 408 was *Orestes*, a devastating retelling of the revenge of Agamemnon's children, in whose nihilistic ending not even Apollo can restore order. If this play had not fared well, this might have impelled him to move from Athens. Or because he had had enough of war and could foresee Athens' ultimate defeat in 405/4? Perhaps Archelaos had made him a very attractive offer. He would not be the only artist to seek out new pastures in old age. The ancients record bizarre stories of his death in 407, in one version torn apart by the royal hounds of the court. At the news of his death, Sophokles is said to have dressed his chorus at the *proagōn* (March 406) in mourning, Aristophanes wrote his masterpiece, *Frogs* (405-L), in which Euripides competes with Aeschylus in the underworld for the throne of tragedy, and Euripides' son produced three plays that his father had written while in Macedon, winning a posthumous victory (Euripides' fifth) with *Bacchae*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and *Alkmaion in Corinth*. The first two are extant and rank among his most powerful plays. More than one critic has wondered if his experience in the wilds of Macedon contributed at all to *Bacchae*, which turns on an antithesis between the city and the mountain. Scullion (2003) challenged the validity of this entire story, pointing out that Aristophanes in *Frogs* (405-L) does not say that Euripides died while in Macedon and argues that the whole thing is an ancient fiction, perhaps based on Agathon's known sojourn at the court of Archelaos.

Euripides' plays

The *Suda* claims that Euripides put on twenty-two productions, that is three tragedies plus one satyr-drama, a total then of eighty-eight dramas. Of the seventy-five or so reasonably secure titles that we have, sixty-six seem to have been tragedies, thus supporting the *Suda's* figure. A scholiast asserts that the extant *Andromache* was not produced at Athens, presumably because he could not find it in the official Athenian lists, and that his *Archelaos* was written and performed for Archelaos of Macedon, during Euripides' stay at his court. However, if Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1206–8 is drawn from *Archelaos*, then that tragedy was actually written and produced in Athens before Euripides left for Macedon. Twenty-two productions require twenty-two satyr-dramas, although *Alkestis* shows that Euripides could experiment with that position. Including *Alkestis* we can with confidence identify about a dozen satyr-dramas, leaving another ten titles lost in the mists of time.

With Euripides we have two manuscript traditions. Several manuscripts preserve part or all of a "selected edition" of ten plays, in presumably the same manner that seven plays were chosen each for Aeschylus and Sophokles. These plays tend to be ones with a high profile in the ancient world (e.g., *Medea*, *Orestes*, *Bacchae*). But a separate tradition has preserved also nine plays roughly in alphabetical sequence, from H through K, and has thus given us a more representative sample that includes the deservedly respected *Hippolytos* and also *Children of Herakles*, which does not show Euripides at the top of his game. To sum up, we have sixteen tragedies, one satyr-drama (*Cyclops*), one quasi-satyr-drama (*Alkestis*), and a play called *Rhesos*. This last is a

dramatic rendering of the events of *Iliad* 10, and although Euripides is known to have written a *Rhesos*, this is very likely not it, but rather a fourth-century effort. If it is by Euripides, it is probably an early work or just possibly another experiment with a play in the fourth position.

We have nine secure dates, either from the hypotheses that accompany the plays or from comments by ancient scholars, who had access to the official records or to works such as Aristotle's lost *Production Lists*:

Euripides' Plays (Secure Dates)

438: *Alkestis*

431: *Medea*

428: *Hippolytos*

415: *Trojan Women*

412: *Helen*

409: *Phoenician Women*

408: *Orestes*

405?: *Bacchae*

405?: *Iphigeneia at Aulis*

[these last two posthumously]

With the exception of *Cyclops* and *Suppliant Women* we can date the remaining nine plays to within a year or two. Some have attempted to use external references to date these plays: such as Eurystheus' prediction in *Children of Herakles*, which could not have been spoken after 430, or the burial of war-dead at Thebes in *Suppliant Women*, which, it is argued, is inspired by an incident with the Thebans following the battle of Delion in 424. But such deductions are dangerous in view of our limited knowledge of the late fifth century.

More reliable is the evidence from Euripides' evolving use of the iambic trimeter, the meter used for most of the episodes in tragedy. Meter in Greek drama does not depend on patterns of stressed syllables, as in modern poetry, but on measures of time, such as $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ notes in music. Behind the spoken, chanted, or sung words of the text lay a rhythm of long and short beats, in a regular pattern and obeying certain rules. The normal iambic trimeter takes the following form, where – is a long syllable, $\cup$ a short syllable, and x either long or short:

$$x - \cup - \mid x - \cup - \mid x - \cup - .$$

Each of the iambic feet, either – – or $\cup -$, can be “resolved” by substituting a three-element foot: a **dactyl** (– $\cup \cup$), an **anapest** ($\cup \cup -$), or a tribrach ($\cup \cup \cup$). This creates a less regular pattern for the “music” of the iambs, and when we examine the nine securely dated plays of Euripides in terms of the percentage of iambic lines that contain a resolution, we find a steady increase from less than 10 percent in the plays of the 430s to nearly 50 percent in late plays such as *Orestes* (408).

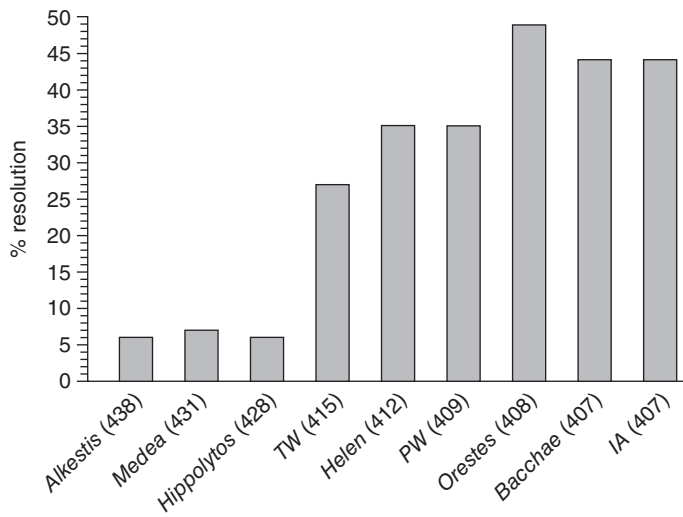


Figure 2.2 *Resolution (Euripides' securely dated plays).*

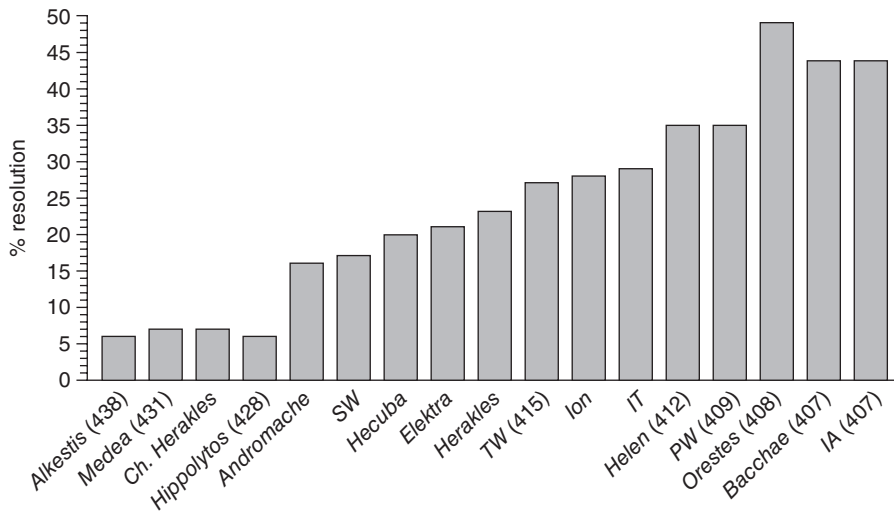


Figure 2.3 *Resolution (Euripides' extant tragedies).*

So if one takes the eight undated tragedies and calculates the percentage of resolution, the results can be added to the data above and the following dates will thus not be far off:

Accepted Dates for Euripides' Plays

- 438: *Alcestis*
- 431: *Medea*
- 430: *Children of Herakles*
- 428: *Hippolytos*
- 427–425: *Andromache*
- 425: *Hecuba*
- 424–420: *Suppliant Women*
- 420 or 419: *Elektra*
- 416: *Herakles*
- 415: *Trojan Women*
- 414: *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*
- 412: *Helen*
- 412–410: *Ion*
- 409: *Phoenician Women*
- 408: *Orestes*
- 405?: *Bacchae*
- 405?: *Iphigeneia at Aulis*
- ???: *Cyclops*

As with Aeschylus, most of these plays lie within the later part of Euripides' life, suggesting that his later career was more productive than his early years.

Euripides was not as successful as Aeschylus and Sophokles in his own lifetime. Ancient sources credit him with four victories while he was alive, as well as the posthumous success with *Bacchae*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and *Alkmaion in Corinth*. One victory was in 441, another in 428 with a production that included the unusual revision of an earlier version of *Hippolytos*. The competition may not have been strong that year: Sophokles' son Iophon and Ion of Chios, Sophokles himself not competing. It would be in the fourth century that Euripides reached his greatest popularity, apart from the late twentieth century which has found his plays particularly appealing.

We have been especially fortunate in the remains of Euripides' lost plays and can see what he did with certain versions of familiar stories. We possess several hundred lines of a late play, *Hypsipyle*, which featured two of his favorite themes, the rescue of a woman in distress and a recognition scene of mother and long-lost children. A good portion of his *Phaethon* is preserved on papyrus – this told the story of the child of the Sun who begged the use of his father's chariot and came to a disastrous end. We have both traditional and papyrus fragments of a play set at Athens, *Erechtheus*, in which a mother consents to the sacrifice of a daughter to save the state, but whose ending is less than totally happy. Another papyrus has given us most of the hypothesis

to *Alexandros*, produced with *Trojan Women* in 415, which dramatized the discovery of Hecuba's lost son, Alexandros (Paris). As this play had at least two characters in common with *Trojan Women* and as the other tragedy of 415 (*Palamedes*) was also set at Troy, it provides some evidence that Euripides was writing a loosely connected "Trojan trilogy" in that year.

Euripides the innovator

As there was no "authorized version" of a particular Greek myth, poets and artists were free to retell the story as they wished. Spectators would be anxious to see how a particular poet treated a particular story, and Euripides' versions were often free and daring. One of the boldest is Medea's murder of her own children to spite her estranged husband, Jason. In earlier versions the children die, either as the revenge of the Corinthians, whose king and princess Medea has murdered, or in an attempt by Medea to make them immortal. Euripides makes great dramatic capital out of her infanticide, both in her agonizing internal debate and in the spectators' gradual realization of the horror she is planning. As early as lines 92–3 the Nurse observes, "I see her looking at them with strange expression," and when the full revelation comes at line 792, "I will kill my children," the spectators are likely to lose most, if not all, of the sympathy which Euripides has built up in the previous scenes. Another equally bold change in plot occurs in *Bacchae*. In the traditional version of the story, Pentheus leads his army out against the women of Thebes, and is defeated and killed by the god-possessed **maenads**. The messenger at 677–774 in fact reports such an encounter between the women and the people living on the plain, and when Pentheus at line 809 orders out his troops, the spectators would be puzzled. Would they be getting another messenger-speech, again relating the defeat of men at the hands of women? But at line 810 Euripides with one line subtly changes the entire direction of the play, as Dionysos tempts Pentheus, "Ah . . . would you like to see the women on the mountain?" Pentheus is ensnared and the new plot-line will take him on a lonely track to the mountain, possessed by the god, dressed as a woman, to be torn apart by his own aunts and mother.

Euripides will add new characters and plot twists to the established myths. In *Orestes* Tyndareus, the father of Helen and Klytaimnestra, arrives from Sparta to ensure that Orestes is punished for murdering his mother. In *Suppliant Women* the Seven against Thebes become loving family men, rather than the ogres of legend, and Kapaneus' widow, Evadne, appears unexpectedly to leap to her death on her husband's funeral pyre. Euripides also brings on her father, Iphis, in an attempt to dissuade her. In *Hecuba* the title character loses her two last children as two plots come together, the sacrifice of Polyxene and the murder of Polydoros, and in *Phoenician Women* the encounter between Oedipus' sons takes place with Oedipus and Jokaste still alive and living in Thebes and a new character added, Kreon's son Menoikeus, who gives his own life in an attempt to save the city.

This innovation in plot was accompanied by a down-to-earth realism. The Aristophanic caricature of Euripides in *Frogs* (951–61) claims that his plays were

“democratic” because they contained real people who talked in a way that the spectators could understand. Minor unnamed characters have memorable roles: the nurse who opens *Medea*; the old man and the nurse in *Hippolytos*, the latter playing a major role in the action; two bloodthirsty old men in *Ion* and *Elektra*, who impel the major characters to their revenge; the Phrygian eunuch in *Orestes* who sings a messenger-speech after scrambling out from under the roof of the palace. The farmer who opens *Elektra* is admittedly from a good family fallen on hard times, but the contrast is deliberately brought out between the traditional aristocrat and “this man of the many” who is proven to be “the best” (*aristos*).

Euripides was especially fond of plots of intrigue, rescue, and supplication. An early group of plays, culminating with *Hippolytos* (428), presents variations on what is called the “Potiphar’s Wife Theme,” in which a woman attempts to seduce an attractive younger man, and when rejected, falsely accuses the young man of attempted seduction or rape. In several plays a character or characters need to be rescued from a threatening situation: Herakles’ family in both *Children of Herakles* and *Herakles*; Iphigeneia in *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* and *Iphigeneia at Aulis*; Andromache and then Hermione in *Andromache*; Kreousa in *Ion*; Helen, Orestes and Elektra in *Orestes*. Much of the action deals with effecting that rescue. Characters in distress often beg others for assistance, as do the children of Herakles in that play and the women of Argos in *Suppliant Women* – in both cases the object of their appeal is Athens. In *Andromache* all three principal characters (Andromache, Hermione, Peleus) have their moment of peril and are rescued after an appeal for help. Orestes in *Orestes* asks Menelaos for help formally and when rebuffed, puts his murderous plan into operation. Perhaps the greatest supplication in Euripides goes unheeded, the appeal by the Trojan women (1280–1) to the gods, who “did not listen when we called before.”

One sub-group of Euripides’ late plays (*Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, *Ion*, *Helen*, and the lost *Andromeda*) shares common characteristics including a rescue, recognition, and a happy ending, sanctioned by the gods. These dramas have been called “tragi-comedy” (Kitto 1961), “Romantic Tragedy” (Conacher 1967), or “Escape-tragedies” (Wright 2005). They begin with a divine action, involve a distressed character (usually female) in an exotic setting, employ a theme of mistaken identity, resolved by a recognition and reunion, and finally a clever plot to escape their situation. These tragedies would have an immense influence upon later Greek and Roman comedy, where such mistaken identity and recognitions would become a staple of that drama.

Euripides and drama

One of the principal differences between tragedy and comedy lies in maintaining the dramatic illusion. While comedy, especially “Old Comedy,” delights in addressing the spectators, calling attention to itself, and engaging with other poets and their works, tragedy faithfully maintains the illusion before the spectators, preserving what we call “the fourth wall of the theater.” A comic character will often consciously address the spectators, as at *Wasps* 56–64 or *Peace* 50–64, but when a tragedy opens with a soliloquy, it is with all the solemnity that we associate with such a speech in

Shakespeare. As far as we can determine from the fourteen plays that we have by Aeschylus and Sophokles, this tragic illusion is constantly maintained throughout. It is drama, we know that these are actors playing their roles and that the action will be consciously structured in a certain way, but we are encouraged to suspend disbelief and enter the unfolding dramatic world.

But at times Euripides appears to be playing with the conventions of drama and admitting that this is a dramatic fiction that he is placing before the spectators. In 438 instead of the usual and expected satyr-drama in the fourth position, he put on *Alkestis*, without satyrs and without Pappasilenos, but at the same time set in the world of European folktale. If we assume that spectators did not know a great deal about the dramatic production they were to see – would the satyr-drama even have had a mention at the *proagōn*? – they would assume that a fourth play called *Alkestis* would be the usual merging of a traditional myth with satyrs and wait expectantly for them to appear. But they never arrive and we see here Euripides' playing with the expectations of his audience and exploring the possibilities of a new sort of quasi-tragedy.

In 428 Euripides took the unusual step of rewriting an earlier tragedy in a bold new way. Sometime in the late 430s he had staged an *Hippolytos*, to which later scholars added the extra title, *Kalyptomenos* or "covering himself," usually explained as Hippolytos' veiling himself in shame on hearing his step-mother's declaration of love for him. This play, unhappily now lost but with about forty lines and considerable *testimonia* extant, was an orthodox Potiphar's Wife story involving a older woman (Phaidra) in love with a virtuous younger man (her step-son, Hippolytos), her attempt at seduction and rejection, her false accusation of rape to her husband (Theseus, Hippolytos' father), and the youth's death from a curse by his father. The *Hippolytos* we have (428) was later given the surname *Stephanias* ("Crowned"), from Hippolytos' initial entrance with a crown for Artemis, and seems to be an inverted Potiphar's Wife drama, with the older woman (Phaidra) in love against her will and motivated by honor, not lust, and a less admirable young man – his rejection of Phaidra is due more to a hatred of women. But noticeably absent from our play are the two crucial scenes to such a story: the declaration of love by the woman to the youth, and her false accusation of rape to her husband. It is not Phaidra who declares her love to Hippolytos, but her Nurse, and Phaidra has already killed herself by the time her husband returns, leaving a suicide note to make her accusation. Was Euripides giving his audience an inverted Potiphar's Wife drama, consciously omitting the scenes that they would normally have expected?

At times Euripides comes close to crossing the line of dramatic illusion. In the recognition-scene of his *Elektra*, the corresponding scene in Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* is firmly in his sights. There the recognition of Orestes by Elektra was effected easily by a lock of hair identical to Elektra's own, by a footprint that matches Elektra's, and a piece of clothing that Elektra had woven for Orestes. See what Euripides does with the same material – the Old Man is reporting to Elektra what he has seen at the tomb of Agamemnon (514–44):

Old Man: I saw cut curls of blond hair, and I wondered, child, who on earth had dared come to the tomb. Certainly not one of the Argives. But perhaps your brother has come

in secret, and on his arrival has honored the wretched tomb of your father. Put this lock of hair beside your own and see if the color of the shorn curl is the same. For it often happens with those of the same father's blood that they have many physical similarities as well.

Elektra: Your words, old man, are not worthy of an intelligent person, if you believe that my brave brother has come in secret to this land because he fears Aigisthos. Besides how will there be any similarity in the locks of hair, the one from a man reared in the wrestling-ground of gentlemen, the other brushed with a woman's care? It's impossible. You would find many people with similar hair who are no relation by blood.

Old Man: But place your foot in the footprint and see if the mark of the boot fits yours, child.

Elektra: But how could there be a footprint on rocky ground? And even if there is, it would not be the same for brother and sister, since the male's will be the larger.

Old Man: But if your brother should come, is there not something you once wove, by which you could recognize him, something he was wearing when I stole him away from death?

Elektra: Don't you realize that when Orestes fled this land, I was still young? If I had been weaving, how could someone who was a child at that time still be wearing those clothes, unless his garments were growing along with his body?

Not only does her assertion of Orestes' bravery directly contradict his own words in the prologue, "I have come to the borders of this land, so that I can run for cover, if any of the guards should recognize me" (96–7), but Euripides systematically undoes every detail of the "romantic" Aeschylean scene to fit the prevailing dark realism of this tragedy. The actual recognition is accomplished when the old man notices a scar on Orestes' forehead, perhaps an homage to the most famous recognition-scene in Greek literature, the scar of Odysseus in *Odyssey* 19.

The reader will not have missed an element of comedy in the recognition-scene from *Elektra*, and such humor does throw the bitter ending of the play into high relief. There are more than a few such comic moments in the extant plays of Euripides. In *Ion* the gruff no-nonsense Xouthos comes out of the temple and embraces the innocent youth, whom he believes to be his son; there is more than a little of "unhand me, sir!" here. In *Children of Herakles* the aged Iolaos, attempting to arm himself and join the coming battle, rather reminds one of *Dad's Army*. In *Helen* Menelaos drags himself on stage, tattered and battered from the shipwreck on the coast of Egypt, encounters a fierce old woman at the door to the palace, and when worsted in a humorous exchange, exclaims, "Alas, where are my armies now?" (453). When we add in the plays with happy endings, recognition-scenes, reunion of lost children and parents, mistaken identities, and complex plots, the sort of material on which later comedy would depend, we can see that Euripides seems to be redefining tragedy in terms of its sister-genre, comedy, just as Aristophanes seeks to define his art as a comic, but still serious, complement to tragedy. F 342 of the comic poet **Kratinos**, very likely from his *Wine-Flask* of 423, links both poets together:

"Who are you?," some clever spectator might ask, a word-quibbler, coiner of maxims, a Euripidaristophaniser.

More than one critic has seen Aristophanes' hostility to Euripides as motivated by the latter's infringement upon the comic poet's territory.

Euripides and psychology

Although neither he nor his audience would have understood the modern term "psychology," Euripides was interested in exploring the mental make-up of his characters and how they came to perform the actions that they did. In *Oresteia* Aeschylus does not present us with a fully fleshed out Orestes – he is more important for what he does than for who he is. But Euripides in both *Elektra* and *Orestes* takes us inside the personality of the man whom a god has ordered to kill his mother. In *Elektra* this Orestes crosses the border by night, ready to run for cover, avoids the recognition with his sister until it is forced upon him by the old man, and takes no part in the planning of the two murders. At the sight of his mother, Orestes (962–87) has second thoughts and wonders if Apollo's oracle was genuine, and in the actual murder Elektra has to guide his hand. Both brother and sister break down with grief and guilt over the slaughter of their mother. Thus it is not a hero who can obey a god and kill his mother, but rather an anti-hero. In both *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* and *Orestes* the Furies are phantoms of Orestes' guilty imagination and not the real goddesses of retribution that Aeschylus brings before our eyes.

Also his *Elektra* explores the very concept of nobility, for the only truly "noble" character in the play is the farmer, a decent sort who has "married" Elektra but never consummated the marriage, "being unworthy I am ashamed to take and violate the child of prosperous parents" (45–6). When Orestes learns of this man's respect for his sister, he wonders aloud about how one should judge true nobility:

There is no certain pointer toward nobility . . . for this man here, who is neither important among the Argives nor proud of the reputation of his family, one man among many, has been discovered as truly noble. Will you not stop being foolish, you who wander about full of empty notions, and judge people as noble by their behavior and their character? (367, 380–5)

Ironically Orestes would fail his own test in this play.

In *Ion* Euripides presents the figure of Kreousa, raped and deserted by Apollo, her baby taken and brought up secretly at Delphi, married to a foreigner for political reasons, and now unable to conceive. What would such a woman be like after sixteen years, when she thinks that her husband is being reunited with his long-lost child, while she remains childless? What would such a proud woman do? In his very bitter *Hecuba* Euripides depicts a woman, who has lost everything, husband, position, city, children, and who suffers two final catastrophic events: the loss of her last daughter and the discovery that the young son whom she sent away for safety has been murdered. All that is left for her is a bloody revenge and then madness. Euripides dramatizes the final collapse of a previously heroic woman. In *Medea* we see the heroine torn between a mother's love for her children and her desire to take vengeance. In her great speech at lines 1021–80, she tosses herself back and forth between her options,

finally choosing revenge (“I hated you [Jason] more than I loved them”). In *Elektra* we meet a Klytaimnestra, who did not spend ten years plotting a revenge for her daughter, but a woman who acted out of desperate impulse rather than premeditation when her husband brought home another woman.

Two young men, Hippolytos and Pentheus in *Bacchae*, can almost be put on the psychiatrist’s couch. Hippolytos has rejected Love (Aphrodite) in favour of her rival, Chastity (Artemis), and refuses to allow Love any part in his life, despite the pleadings of an old man, who argues that all deities deserve respect. Hippolytos’ mother was an Amazon, he himself a bastard son of Theseus, brought up not in Athens, but in Troizen. How much has this sense of apartness contributed to his psychic make-up? His horses are frightened by the “bull from the sea,” a symbol of male sexuality, and drag him to his death. Can we read into Euripides’ play the notion that a repressed force will destroy one? In *Bacchae* much is made of Pentheus’ youth and a youthful obsession with the world of sex. His instant reaction to the rites of Dionysos is that they are an excuse for the women to engage in nocturnal sexual carrying-on. He seems to be intrigued by the indeterminate gender of the disguised Dionysos and to be fixated upon his mother. Here too we wonder if Euripides is dramatizing the devastating effects of sexuality suppressed.

Euripides and women

The crusty old men in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* refer to “these women hateful to the gods . . . and to Euripides” (283) and in *Women at the Thesmophoria* the women of Athens assemble to take action against Euripides for slandering them in his plays. Thus in his own lifetime Euripides could be stereotyped as presenting “bad women” in his plays. In *Frogs* the comic caricature of Aeschylus adds (1078–82):

For what evils is he not responsible? Hasn’t he shown women acting as go-betweens, giving birth in temples, sleeping with their brothers, and saying “Life is not life?”

Here specific women from Euripides’ plays are meant: the nurses in *Stheneboia* and *Hippolytos*; Auge in the lost play named for her; the sister in *Aiolos*; a character in *Polyidos*. But Euripides depicted not so much “bad women,” but women as characters of importance in the action. He was not doing anything new – witness Aeschylus’ Klytaimnestra and daughters of Danaos, or Sophokles’ Deianeira and Antigone – but he did show frequently women acting and why they were acting. There *were* plays with “bad” women, such as the variations on the Potiphar’s Wife theme – his Stheneboia in the lost play of that name seems to have tried twice to seduce Bellerophon – or his Auge, who attempts to explain away her illegitimate children in pseudo-scientific terms. But the women that we see in the surviving plays are for the most part sympathetic rather than villains: Phaidra in *Hippolytos*, fighting against her role as a “Potiphar’s Wife” and motivated by virtue and honor, who acts only when she fears that Hippolytos will break his oath and reveal her secret; Kreousa in *Ion*, mentioned above; Andromache, the concubine of the man whose father killed her first

husband; Iphigeneia in *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, who still feels for Greece and for her family; and even Klytaimestra in *Elektra*, who feels sympathy and understanding for her estranged daughter and wonders whether “I pushed my hate against my husband too much.” In *Iphigeneia at Aulis* Klytaimestra, faced with the imminent sacrifice of her daughter, pleads with her husband not to make her “a bad woman” (1183–4), alluding intertextually to the earlier portrait of her by Aeschylus.

Perhaps the boldest treatment of women *qua* women lies in his *Trojan Women*, where Euripides chose to present as the principal characters of his play defeated enemy women. Women were expected to be passive entities in Athenian society – compare the fuss made about Antigone and Elektra being outdoors in Sophokles’ dramas – and the Trojan women are just that, passive and completely subject to their male captors. But they are sympathetically portrayed, and every time a male character enters from the Greek camp, something tragic happens to the women. In his *Medea* Euripides takes a figure of traditional myth with three strikes against her: a foreigner, a woman, and a practitioner of the dark arts, and makes a living and sympathetic human character out of her, who attracts the sympathy of the chorus of Corinthian women, as well as of most modern audiences, with her proclamation at lines 248–51:

They say of us women that we live a life free from danger inside the house, while they fight in battle. Idiots! I would rather stand three times in battle than bear one child.

Euripides would gain a reputation as a woman-hater, allegedly because he put “bad” women in his play, but, as we have seen, his tragedies are concerned with women of all sorts. Counterbalancing Elektra there is Iphigeneia, against the wanton Phaidra of the earlier *Hippolytos* we can set the woman of the revision who is truly *sōphrōn* (“virtuous”), and even Helen can go from the egocentric demon of *Trojan Women* to the Penelope-like damsel in distress in *Helen*. That some of his plays (and principally, we suspect, his earlier plays) display women behaving in defiance of accepted custom is not evidence of any personal misogyny. It may tell us something about Athenian social stereotypes and popular attitudes, but Euripides was first and foremost concerned with creating compelling drama.

Euripides and the gods

In Aeschylus’ plays the traditional gods were to be taken seriously. They were responsible for maintaining order in the world, and did appear on his stage. On the whole his gods are in control and dispense justice (*dikē*), although “their grace comes with violence.” Sophokles seems to have been less willing to present the gods on stage in his tragedy, and his view of the world is at times dark and ironic, not to say “tragic.” Euripides was the dramatist most prone to bringing gods into the action of his plays, and as with his portrayals of women, a contemporary stereotype had emerged. In Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria* a woman complains (443–58) that Euripides “has said that there are no gods” and thus ruined her trade in wreaths for religious occasions, and in *Frogs* (888–94) the caricature of Euripides prays to his own new

deities: Aither, Tongue, and Mind. Satyros says that Kleon prosecuted him for impiety, and in the third century AD a student's proposed essay topic is to write a defense speech for Euripides in such a trial.

Euripides was especially interested in dramatizing the gap between the reality of gods as they were traditionally portrayed, anthropomorphic superhumans with all the failings of mortals, and the ideal as imagined by human beings. Almost always his gods do not live up to the standards imposed upon them by men. In *Elektra* Orestes doubts the wisdom of Apollo's oracle, "I will not say that those oracles were right" (981), and his doubts will be confirmed by Kastor's assertion (1246), "Apollo may be a god of wisdom, but that oracle was not wise." At the end of *Orestes* the gods have lost control of events – Helen, threatened with death by Orestes and Pylades, will be taken to join the gods – and after Apollo has pronounced judgment, Orestes responds, "Thank you, Apollo, for putting all things right, but as you began to speak, I thought I was hearing the voice of a demon" (1669). In *Ion* Apollo has raped and abandoned a mortal woman. Ion's comment is vintage Euripides, "since you have the power, pursue what is right" (439–40), and at the end Athene appears for Apollo, since he was worried that the human characters "might blame him for what has transpired" (1557–8).

Euripides' dramas are not implying that the traditional gods do not exist. This is abundantly clear in *Hippolytos*, where the play is framed by Aphrodite and Artemis, representing Lust and Chastity respectively. Hippolytos' devotion to Artemis is legitimate and moving in the scene at the start of the play where he lays a wreath in her honor. Likewise both the Nurse and the chorus proclaim Love as a cosmic force:

She is in the heaven and in the waves of the sea, everything comes from her; she is the one who sows and grants lust, from which spring all of us, her children on earth. (447–52)

Love over all things you alone command royal power. (1280–1)

Euripides has created a neat ring composition in this drama: False Love (1–57) + True Chastity (58–87): True Love (1268–81) + False Chastity (1282–1439). Love and Chastity may be real and operative forces in the world, but they are not a pair of jealous superhumans, playing with humans like chess pawns.

Bacchae is more of a critics' battleground, since Dionysos seems to appear as both traditional unsympathetic deity ("Though a god I was wronged by you. _ Gods should not be like humans in their passions," 1347–8) and as a cosmic force that is potentially beneficial and destructive. Are we on Dionysos' side as the play unfolds, and if so, when does our sympathy end and switch to his human antagonist, Pentheus? Or do we with one school of criticism view the play from start to finish as a condemnation of a dangerous deity, one who is essentially hostile to human society? There is much to be said for the negative interpretation. The women have abandoned their own infants to run wild on the mountain and suckle the young of beasts, and when provoked, destroy crops of cattle, the primary symbols of human civilization. Much is made of the insolence (*hybris*) of Pentheus towards Dionysos – the word used above ("I was wronged"), but the first time the word occurs in the play it is used of Hera's divine violence toward a mortal (Semele, 9), and at line 113 the chorus hold *thyrsos*i, described as *hybristai* ("assault weapons"). The defenders of Dionysos, Teiresias, and

Kadmos, appear as a pair of aged would-be revelers, the one mouthing contemporary mock-science and the other just happy to have a god in the family. And what about the chorus? How would an Athenian male audience have reacted to these strangely dressed foreign women, accompanied by those incessant drums? And are we actually to believe that their championing of the unquestioned ordinary life at 429–30, “whatever the simple folk believe and practice, that I would accept,” could ever represent an actual opinion of the most sophistic of all Greek poets? Pentheus *is* given a choice: accept this new god or suffer the consequences, but on this negative reading he is toyed with by Dionysos and led to a cruel death, all because he refused to accept that this smooth-talking, cross-dressing charlatan before him was a god.

In the prologue of *Trojan Women*, we see two gods, Poseidon and Athene, who have supported opposite sides in the war, come together to take vengeance on the victorious Greeks, not because the Greeks have destroyed Troy or will treat their captives cruelly, but because Athene’s honor has been compromised. Poseidon comments, “why must you drive your loves and hates so hard?” (67), although he consents readily to her request to raise a great storm against the Greeks: “this will be done; your request does not require great speeches” (87–8). The prologue does not contribute to the plot-line of the play, but it does show us what the Trojan women will realize as the drama develops, not that there are no gods, but that the gods exist and they don’t care. *Trojan Women* thus becomes a bitter drama of tragic knowledge.

There may be the occasional benevolent deity in Euripides. Apollo in *Alkestis* is kindly motivated toward the house of Admetos, although this play is a quasi-satyr-drama and the divine world is that of European folk-tale, rather than Greek Olympos. In the closing scene of *Andromache* Thetis appears to comfort her mortal husband at the loss of his grandson and to promise him an eternal life of bliss with her in her father’s house (Nereus the sea-god). But we notice that she had left the marriage and is now proposing a reconciliation on her terms. At the end of *Herakles* Theseus attempts to put Herakles’ situation in divine perspective by adducing the tales of how the gods mistreat each other. Herakles’ reply is blunt and very Euripidean (1345–6):

Those tales of chaining I never have and never will believe them. If a god is truly a god, then he needs nothing. The rest is just the lying tales of poets.

Or from his lost *Bellerophon*, “if gods do wrong, they are not gods” (F 292.7). In this lost tragedy Bellerophon was presented as an essentially good man, unfairly treated in life and searching for divine justice.

Euripides and the polis

Unlike Sophokles who held several offices within the state, we know of no political career for Euripides, at least in Athens, for the *Life of Euripides* records on doubtful authority that he took over the financial administration at the court of Archelaos. It is possible that he served on an embassy to Syracuse (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1384b 13–17), although this may well be another Euripides – the name is not uncommon.

While his plays lack the direct political connections of Aeschylus' *Persians* or *Eumenides*, there are some places where the contemporary background seems to impact upon his drama. The declaration by Eurystheus at the end of *Children of Herakles* that he will protect Athens from the descendants of Herakles (the Spartans) may well reflect the limited Spartan invasion of Attica in 431, and *Suppliant Women* (very likely 422) with its theme of denying burial to the war-dead will have gained much if performed in the aftermath of the battle of Delion (late 424), where the Thebans refused to give up the Athenian dead (Thucydides 4.97–101).

Also in *Suppliant Women*, Euripides' most openly political play, a messenger describes the courageous actions of Theseus, king of Athens, in the battle before Thebes (726–30):

This is the sort of man to elect as general, who is courageous in time of danger and loathes an insolent people that in their success have tried to climb the top step of the ladder and so lost the prosperity they should have enjoyed.

The word used for general is *stratēgos*, not “king,” the most important elected office in democratic Athens. Theseus is being viewed not as monarch of legend, but as contemporary leader, and the description of an “insolent people that has lost its prosperity” might suit Athens well after eight years of disastrous war. In *Orestes* a speaker proposing the death of Orestes and Elektra is described as a “man with no gates on his tongue, cocky with courage . . . but he was speaking the words of another” has been seen as a specific allusion to a current demagogue, Kleophon, an unlikely reference, but the passage does reflect well the demagogues who currently infested Athenian politics.

Most of his extant plays were written against the background of the Peloponnesian War (431–404), which Euripides uses as a sub-text to his dramatic presentations of the war against Troy. He shows us the sufferings of war, on victors and on victims – in *Andromache* the war at Troy was a “plague that dripped bloody death on both sides alike.” In *Trojan Women* he takes the bold step of making the chief characters defeated foreign women and portrays the national gods of Athens (Poseidon and Athene) as caring little for either side. In *Iphigeneia at Aulis* events are out of control. The Greek leaders are “crazed for war,” the young Achilles cannot rescue the damsel in distress, and when Iphigeneia goes willingly to her death “for Greece,” Euripides makes us wonder if either the Greece of mythical times or his own age is worth the sacrifice. Webster's observation (1967: 28–9) remains the classic statement of Euripides' hostility to war, especially unnecessary warfare:

What is clear is that Euripides hated war and particularly aggressive war. In the *Heraclidae* the Athenians fight to protect suppliants, in the *Suppliants* they fight for the Panhellenic law that the dead must be buried, in the *Erechtheus* they fight against a foreign invasion. It is only such occasions that justify war with all its horror and degradation.

Euripides is sometimes viewed as an activist critic of his own city, much as American artists and intellectuals of the 1960s attacked the United States for its involvement

in Vietnam, but Athens fares well in his dramas. She is still the protectress of the weak and champion of international law, a democracy as opposed to the monarchies and tyrannies elsewhere. In *Trojan Women* the first place (218–19) that the captive women choose to be sent is “the holy and sacred land of Theseus.” In *Ion* he does show us a woman and a chorus who actually believe that the first Athenian sprang from the earth herself and that the results of a jingoistic patriotism can lead to attempted murder, but at the end gives Athenians a divine pedigree surpassing other Greeks. In *Trojan Women*, however, he does cross the line, for this tragedy was produced in 415 against the background of the preparations for the armada against Sicily. Euripides has the two national gods of Athens open the play and foretell the destruction of a Greek fleet returning from an aggressive foreign war – if they appeared on the top of the *skēnē*-building, could Euripides have resisted having his actors strike their famous pose from the pediments of the Parthenon looming above the theater? Euripides dramatizes the sufferings on both sides in an aggressive foreign war, at a time when Athens was preparing for just such a war in Sicily. Interesting also is the fact that another of the captives’ preferred locations is “the land of Etna, belonging to Hephaistos, mother of the mountains of Sicily – I hear it is famous for its crowns of excellence” (220–3).

Euripides used his dramas to question the assumptions and self-assertions that Athens made in his time. Part of her self-image was the reception of refugees and the protection of the oppressed. But in *Medea* the chorus properly wonders how Athens can provide refuge for one who has killed her children. Medea has tricked Aigeus into granting her asylum, but he and his city are now bound by his oath. In *Herakles* Euripides adds the arrival of Theseus to the story of Herakles’ murder of his family. Theseus will take Herakles with all his blood guilt to Athens, and there cleanse him and provide with a home and a livelihood. In *Children of Herakles* Euripides takes a myth in which the Athenians took great pride: their championing of Herakles’ family against persecution by Eurystheus, and in the course of the drama reminds his audience that the descendants of these children will become the Spartans now at war with Athens. In *Ion* Kreousa and her hand-maidens seriously believe the story that her grandfather sprang from the earth itself and was guarded by serpents as an infant (267–72). But 300 lines later (542) Ion and Xouthos agree that “the earth does not bear children.” Kreousa’s pride in her Athenian ancestry will lead in the end to the attempted murder of Ion to preserve the purity of the Athenian royal line.

Euripides and the “new music”

Power (2010: 501) describes Athenian New Music as “that loosely affiliated, mutually influential group of citharodic, dithyrambic, and dramatic composers and performers intent on various forms of musical and poetic experimentation and complexity.” Csapo (1999) employs the term “theatre music,” which found its most common expression in large-scale public performances such as the dithyramb and the drama. Ancient sources regarded Terpander (seventh century) as the founder of music for the lyre and the canon to which performers should conform. But Terpander’s traditional style was challenged by the “New Musicians” such as Phrynis, Kinesias (of Athens),

and Timotheos, perhaps the most important and influential of the group. Aristophanes in *Acharnians* (425) has his main character, Dikaiopolis, praise a traditional musician, Dexitheos, and express disgust at Chairis for his handling of a familiar theme, while in the revised *Clouds* (ca. 419) the older Logos (Right) is indignant with Phrynīs' new-fangled modulations.

A clever comic fragment (F 155) from Pherekrates' *Chiron* (ca. 400) presents Music complaining to Justice of her treatment by these musicians in terms which are intended to be sexually suggestive:

Music: I will tell you and gladly. For your heart takes pleasure in hearing and mine in telling. Melanippides was the start of all my troubles, the first of them to grab me and loosen me up and make me slacker with twelve strings. But still this man was acceptable to me, compared with my current woes. Then Kinesias, that damned Athenian, by inserting off-key modulations in his stanzas, so completely destroyed me that in the creation of his dithyrambs his right seems to be his left, like objects in a mirror. But even he was an acceptable man for me. Then Phrynīs thrust in his own whirlwind and just about killed me, turning and twisting me with his twelve harmonies on five strings. But still he treated me all right and if he did me wrong, he soon made it up to me. But now, my dear, Timotheos has buried and scraped me most indecently.

Justice: What's this Timotheos like?

Music: A certain red-head from Miletos. He has caused me real problems and far outdone those other men I mentioned, leading me along his bizarre ant-paths. If he meets me when I am out walking by myself, he has me stripped and undone on twelve strings.

Kinesias appears in *Birds* (414) as the musician seeking inspiration in the clouds, while Strattis devoted an entire comedy to him. One poet not included by Pherekrates was Philoxenos, whose poem, *Cyclops*, showed that monster in love with the sea-nymph, Galatea. Aristophanes in *Wealth* (388) makes fun of this work in a choral song at the opening of the comedy.

These poets were innovators. They added new strings to the lyre, incorporated flexible elements into the strophic structure, introduced lyric solos, preludes and musical flourishes, and emphasized virtuoso performance. Their music is most frequently described in terms of "twists and turns" and "strange paths"; above all, it is "new." It outraged those whose sensibilities preferred music in its traditional form, and our view of the New Music is largely colored by its detractors, who included the influential figures of Plato and Aristotle. In their view it catered to popular and vulgar taste, and depended upon complexity and emotional effects. But Csapo (1999: 417) sees in the New Music something entirely appropriate to the Dionysiac setting at which dithyramb and drama were performed: "a new type of song which liberated music's power to inflame, disorient, and intoxicate through its intensity, range, colours, ornament, polyphony, mimicry, synaesthesia, and dizzying volubility."

Perhaps the most influential of the New Musicians was Timotheos (446–357), whose best-known poem *Persians* (ca. 410) told the Greek victory at Salamis from the viewpoint of a defeated Persian. Euripides is said to have encouraged Timotheos in his musical innovations, and another ancient writer on tragedy records that Euripides was the first to employ polychordy in his lyrics as well as more scales and colors, and

that his music was described as being pierced through like an ant-hill. The same metaphor is used of Agathon's lyrics at *Women at the Thesmophoria* 100 and of Timotheos' "ant-tracks" at Pherekrates F 155.

Euripides was part of these innovations in theatrical music, perhaps even in the vanguard of these developments. We may observe a number of things about Euripides' lyric technique, especially in his later career. First, although the amount of lyric in a Euripidean play remains roughly constant, the actual role of the chorus decreases both in size and importance, while that of the actor increases. In *Elektra* the choral songs are more like *entr'actes*, with little apparent relevance to the plot unfolding in the episodes, although they counterpoise an idyllic age of myth to the grim reality of the play. In many dramas the chorus seems to be there to give the protagonist someone to talk to in the early course of the play. In *Ion*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and *Phoenician Women* they are tourists visiting the scene of the action. But there are dramas such as *Trojan Women* and *Bacchae*, where the chorus is absolutely fundamental and their songs integral to the understanding of the tragedy. Choral songs in late Euripides can become involved and emotionally intense, often with cultic associations, such as the ode to Demeter (*Helen* 1301–68), the marriage of Peleus and Thetis (*Iphigeneia at Aulis* 1036–97), and any of the powerful odes in *Bacchae*. From 415 on almost all the choruses in Euripides' plays are women, perhaps more appropriate for the intensity of the New Music.

As the choral role decreases, that of the actor becomes more crucial, not just in the episodes, which in late plays can go for hundreds of lines with multiple scenes, for example at *Orestes* 356–806, with four separate scenes. The actor's lyrics increase significantly from a minimal role ca. 430 to more than half the choral part by 408. The innovative rhythms and techniques of the New Music were well suited to expressing the inner emotional turmoil of the actors. Euripides was especially fond of the monody ("solo song"), a lyric performed by an actor on his own. Characters in Sophokles do sing. Antigone has a very moving song with the chorus at *Antigone* 806–82, and Ajax' entry at *Ajax* 348–429 is in lyrics – but they do so as part of a formal exchange with the chorus (*kommos*) or another character. Monodies are free-standing and unstructured arias performed by a character, usually women in great distress. Three of Euripides' monodies are sung by men: the boy Ion (112–83), the blinded barbarian king in *Hecuba* (1056–82), and the Phrygian eunuch in *Orestes* (1369–1502), that is by males on the margin. The most powerful monody is that sung by the childless Kreousa in *Ion*, upon learning that her husband has been given a child by Apollo, the very god who raped her years before:

My soul, how do I keep silence, how do I reveal a love long hidden, how do I abandon shame? (859–61)

Before this light of day I proclaim you guilty, son of Leto [Apollo]. You came to me, your hair gleaming with gold, as I was gathering saffron-hued flowers into the folds of my gown, flowers that shone back to the sun. (885–90)

The composition of Kreousa's song is not the familiar *strophē* + *antistrophē* of the dithyramb or the choral ode, but a much freer structure: three lines in lyric (859–61),

then nineteen lines in anapestic dimeter (862–80), the normal marching-on meter of the chorus, and then over forty lines in free lyric (881–922). Aristophanes would make great comic fun out of Euripidean monodies at *Frogs* 1331–63, where the comic Aeschylus performs a monody in the manner of Euripides, by a woman complaining that her neighbor has stolen her rooster.

In addition to the free composition of the monody, Euripides would introduce the techniques of repeating words, usually adjectives, and of carrying a single syllable over several metrical beats – nothing strange for the modern ear – but not traditional in Greek lyric. One such example occurs on a papyrus containing the text and notes of a lyric from *Orestes* (lines 322–8), where one syllable is directed over two notes, and Aristophanes twice in *Frogs* has “Aeschylus” spin out the verb *heilissein* (“wind”) over several beats. Csapo (1999) points out that Euripides is especially fond of using *heilissein* and *dinein* (“whirl”) in his lyrics, which he connects with the wild emotional nature of the Dionysiac dithyramb.

Perhaps the boldest use of song occurs in *Orestes*, when instead of the expected messenger speech we get a Phrygian eunuch climbing out through the *skênê*-building and then reporting in a highly emotional song the attempted murder of Helen inside the palace. Here Euripides has melded monody with the messenger speech and produced a striking result. Timotheos’ *Persians*, performed around 410, portrayed the battle of Salamis from the viewpoint of the defeated Persians, including a direct song by a Phoenician sailor. It is an attractive supposition that Euripides’ bizarre messenger-monody was inspired by Timotheos’ poem.

Thus a drama by Euripides was something exciting, anticipated perhaps by many – we are told that Sokrates always attended the theater when Euripides was presenting his plays – perhaps dreaded by others of a more traditional inclination. Aeschylus and Sophokles were already established “classics,” and Euripides in the next century would become the most popular of all the tragic poets. But in his own lifetime he was a figure of controversy, a poet who was *sophos*, a word which carries the connotations of both “wise” and “wise guy,” and *dexios*, “clever” and “too clever by half.” Audiences would come to expect a bold and innovative treatment of the traditional myth, with realistic and even unpleasant characters, and above all a sense of discomfort, since one is never quite sure where one is in a play by Euripides. In *Ion* Athenian self-pride and her personal myth of autochthony becomes the theme for the play – in the end Athenians are given a superior pedigree over other Greeks, but it has been an uncomfortable trip getting there. In *Bacchae* the exuberant celebration of life in Dionysos gradually yields to the depiction of a typical Euripidean god, who cruelly toys with humans and lacks what we would call morality. In *Medea* Euripides has taken the mysterious foreign sorceress of legend, turned her briefly into a sympathetic tragic heroine, before returning her to the status of the inhuman woman of power. Gods do not appear on stage in *Medea*, nor are they active beneath the text, as is Apollo in *Oedipus Tyrannos* or Eros in *Trachinian Women*. The play concludes not with a *deus ex machina*, but a *femina ex machina*, for whom passion has triumphed over reason, who disposes events in the manner traditionally reserved for the gods.

The Other Tragedians

Pseudo-Plutarch (*Moralia* 841f.) records that in 330 the politician **Lykourgos** proposed a decree: “that bronze statues of Aeschylus, Sophokles, and Euripides be erected, that their tragedies should be written down and kept in a public place, that the clerk of the city should read these over with the performers, and that tragedies that did not conform would not be put on.” This was clearly a measure to stop the altering of the traditional texts, either to make them compatible with other versions of the story or to increase the roles of the actors. In so doing Lykourgos not only established the official text of these tragic poets, but also created the canonical triad of ancient tragedy. But these three were not the only ones writing and performing tragedy at Athens. Some of the others in fact, even in the fifth century, came from other Greek cities (Ion from Chios, and Achaïos from Eretria). Some we can date to specific occasions (Karkinos’ victory in 446, Iophon’s in 435, Euphorion’s victory in 431, Ion and Iophon losing to Euripides in 428, Agathon’s victory at the Lenaia in 416, Xenokles winning in 415). The first volume of *TrGF* lists over 200 lost tragedians, nearly fifty for the fifth century. We have perhaps been too much influenced by Dionysos’ dismissive remarks at *Frogs* 71–95 about the current chatterboxes “who have pissed all over Tragedy.” On occasion one of these “others” defeated the great ones. Euphorion defeated both Sophokles and Euripides in 431, perhaps with material left over by his father, Aeschylus; Xenokles in 415 won over Euripides’ plays set at Troy (including *Trojan Women*), earning the scornful comment from Aelian (*Historical Miscellany* 2.18), “whoever *he* was;” and Philokles defeated Sophokles’ *Oedipus Tyrannos* (Aristeides 46.334).

Writing tragedy ran in families. Both Sophokles and Euripides had sons and grandsons who continued the tragic profession, and we know also of the family of Karkinos, like Sophokles, a general in the 430s, where three generations of tragedians are documented (Karkinos [*TrGF* 21], Xenokles [*TrGF* 33], Karkinos [*TrGF* 70]), and especially the family of Aeschylus, spanning five generations and including eight poets (*TrGF* I p. 88). In many cases we have a fair amount of *testimonia* about a poet (e.g., Karkinos, Iophon, or Melanthios), but very few actual remains on which to judge them.

Phrynichos (*TrGF* 3) has been discussed in the section on Early Tragedy. He belongs before Aeschylus in the tragic tradition; his career can be dated ca. 510 to ca. 470. He is especially associated with dance and songs – the role of the chorus may have been larger than that in Sophokles or Euripides. At least twice he wrote plays with historically topical subjects, rather than with subjects from myth.

Ion of Chios (*TrGF* 19) wrote many sorts of poetry and prose and appears in the collections of ancient tragedians, lyric poets, philosophers, and historians. His *Epidemiai* (“Visits”) appear to be the first recorded collection of anecdotes, and he moved with and knew the great men of his day (Kimon, Perikles, Sophokles). We can date his career roughly from 450 to 422; a joke at *Peace* 832–7 only works if he has recently died by 421. His only certain date is 428, when he finished third behind Euripides

and Iophon. The *Suda* assigns him twelve, thirty, or forty plays, and over eighty assorted fragments of his work survive. Longinus (33.5) compares him to Sophokles with the dismissive comment that no sane person would trade the *Oedipus* for all of Ion. We know the most about a satyr-drama, *Omphale*, whose subject was Herakles' year-long servitude to Omphale, queen of Lydia. Three fragments describe a journey of Hermes and Herakles (F 17a–19), while F 22 shows Omphale's reception of Herakles:

Well then, you Lydian harpers, and singers of ancient hymns, honor the stranger.

Herakles' typical behavior, "he gulped down the kindling and the coals" is the subject of F 29. The interesting comparison of Greek and foreign life-styles at F 24, "it is better to know about perfume and myrrh and Sardian adornment for the skin than about the way of life on Pelops' island," was perhaps spoken by Omphale or a member of her court, but Herakles converted to *la dolce vita* is also a possibility.

Agathon (*TrGF* 39) seems to have had only a short career at Athens. He won with his first tragedy at the Lenaia of 416, and he has left Athens by 405 (*Frogs* 83–5). That his career at Athens lasted but a decade may explain why only six titles are attested for him. But he has attracted our attention through his appearance in two well-known texts, caricatured as the effete poet in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411) and then as a central figure in Plato's seminal work, *Symposium*. Both works combine to produce a picture of Agathon as the beautiful tragedian, both in person and in his works, whose lyrics cause the old man in Aristophanes' comedy to shiver in erotic delight and whose speech in Plato is a brilliant party-piece about Love as Beauty. Aristotle records two distinct contributions to the development of tragedy, that he was the first to write choral lyrics that had no relevance to their plot but were interchangeable between plays (*embolima* "interludes": *Poetics* 1456a25) and that his play *Antheus* contained an invented plot with non-traditional characters and "it pleases no less" (*Poetics* 1451b19).

Only a few dozen fragments remain, only a couple more than two lines in length. Of these F 6 (*Telephos*) shows a character unfamiliar with writing explaining the letters of the name "Theseus," "the first character was a circle with a stone in the middle," that is Θ or theta. Agathon was known for his antithetical expressions, of which F 12 is a good instance:

If I tell you the truth, I will not please you; if I am to please you, I will not tell the truth.

He seems to have been something of an avant-garde dramatist and very much involved in the New Music.

Kritias (*TrGF* 43; born ca. 460, died 403) was the uncle of Plato and leader of the oligarchic government in 404/3, known as the "Thirty Tyrants." But he was also recognized as a philosopher and as a dramatist. The *Life of Euripides* attributes three plays of Euripides (*Tennes*, *Rhadamanthos*, *Pirithous*) to Kritias, and we have fragments of a satyr-drama called *Sisyphos*. An ancient plot summary of *Pirithous* along with the first sixteen lines of the play has survived – the play was set in the underworld and

dealt with the rescue of Pirithous and Theseus by Herakles. The lines we have show the arrival of Herakles to the underworld and his meeting with Aiakos, the gatekeeper (F 1). The chorus seems to have been made up of deceased initiates of the Mysteries (F 2), and one is struck by the parallels to Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405-L), which had a similar setting, a chorus of initiates, and an encounter between "Herakles" and Aiakos. In fact it has been argued that at *Frogs* 111, when Dionysos refers to Herakles' visit to the underworld to fetch Kerberos, he is alluding intertextually to Herakles' recent appearance in *Pirithous*. This would, however, support Euripidean authorship of *Pirithous*, since Kritias was in exile from 411 to 404.

The most intriguing fragment of Kritias comes from his *Sisyphos*, forty lines on the early history of humanity and the invention of religion as a means for the powerful to control the masses (F 19.12–21):

Then some clever and intelligent man came up with fear of the gods, so that evil men might be afraid, even if they acted or said or thought something in secret. And so he developed the idea of the divine, that there is a god endowed with immortal life, who hears everything that is said among men and is able to see all that is done.

Such a cynical and sophistic attitude fits well with the personality of the man who led the oligarchs in 404, and perhaps also explains how his plays came to be confused with those of Euripides.

In the fourth century tragedy continued to be written and performed, but with considerable change. The theatrical records for 342/1 and 341/0 show that satyr-dramas had been reduced to one performance at the beginning, and that there was a formal production of an "old" tragedy, in those years Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and *Orestes* respectively. Tragedy in the fourth century is but a pale reflection of the fifth. Known playwrights from the period abound, including Dionysios the tyrant of Syracuse (*TrGF* 76), but the most popular tragic poet of the fourth century was Euripides, who achieved posthumously in that century the popularity that he lacked in his own lifetime.

Among the leading lights of the fourth century we may mention Astydamos the younger (*TrGF* 60), a member of the family of Aeschylus, whose career can be dated from the 370s to at least 340. He is credited with 240 plays and fifteen victories, and was honored with a bronze statue in the reconstructed theater. Aristotle (*Poetics* 1453b29) cites his *Alkmaion* as an instance of a play wherein a character both commits a dreadful deed and recognizes his relationship to the victim. Over fifty lines on a papyrus *may* come from his *Hektor*. Another tragedian of note is Theodektas (*TrGF* 72), not from Athens but from Phaselos, a pupil of Isokrates, who wrote treatises on rhetoric as well as drama. His short career began in the 370s and he was dead by 350. He is credited with fifty plays and eight victories. Aristotle (*Poetics* 1455b29, 1452a27) speaks approvingly of his *Lynkeus*, a re-working of Aeschylus' *Daughters of Danaos*, for the reversal of events in the play. Unfortunately the fragments of any substance (F 6–18) cannot be assigned to any particular play. Finally there is Chairemon (*TrGF* 71), another tragedian of the mid-fourth century, for whom nine titles are known, including his *Achilles Kills Thersites*. A vase dating ca. 350 may show a scene from this



Figure 2.4 Tableau scene from a volute-krater, ca. 340s. Close to the style of the Varrese Painter. This is often taken to be illustrating a scene from the lost tragedy, *Achilles Slays Thersites*, by Chairemon. Reproduced courtesy of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1900.03.804). Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

play (fig. 2.4), as well as a partial list of the characters. Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1413b8) thought that his plays were better read than watched. The only substantial fragment (F 14) comes from his *Oineus*, describing a group of maenads asleep on the hillside.

At the end of the century we encounter the Athenian Moschion (*TrGF* 97), two of whose plays (*Themistokles*, *Men of Pherai*) seem to have revived the historical approach of Phrynichos and of Aeschylus in *Persians*. His longest fragment (F 6) describes the early history of humanity, including the gifts of Demeter and Dionysos (bread, wine) in terms that recall Teiresias' discourse in *Bacchae* (266–327). In F 4 the speaker praises Athens' vaunted freedom of speech:

But I shall never pass over in silence what is right and just. For it is good thing nobly to preserve the freedom of speech that is ingrained in the citizens of Athene and the city of Theseus.

Since this belongs to the period of the Macedonian domination, it has more than a little poignancy about it.

After 300 the center of literary activity passes from mainland Greece to the university city of **Alexandria**. In the reign of Ptolemy II (285–253) there flourished a group of seven scholar poets, known as the “Pleiad,” from the seven stars that make up the stellar group known as the Pleiades. The only author of any note is Lykophron (*TrGF* 100), for whom twenty titles, but only a few fragments, remain. We can only guess how the intellectual scholar-poets of Alexandria handled the traditional form of tragedy.

Recommended Reading

Greek tragedy

- Goldhill 1986: An “advanced critical introduction” to reading Greek tragedy, full of insightful observations on matters such as drama and the *polis*, drama and gender, drama and enlightenment.
- Gregory 2005: A collection of thirty-one newly commissioned essays by leading authorities, covering contexts, elements, approaches, and reception. Highly recommended for students at all levels.
- Hall 2010: A collection of incisive essays at an advanced level, with four general studies (play-makers, community identities, confrontations, minds) and chapters on each of the three major tragedians and on the tragic fragments.
- Kitto 1961: The first major study of Greek tragedy as literature (the “New Criticism”), Kitto’s work is still well worth the student’s attention.
- McAuslan and Walcot 1993: A collection of previously published essays pitched at a “student-friendly” level. Covers both general topics on tragedy (“character,” “Heraclides”) and treatments of individual plays.

Aeschylus

- Conacher 1980, 1987, 1996: A “walking tour” through the plays, with first-rate commentary and useful appendices on points of contention.
- Herington 1986: A basic introduction to the life and times of Aeschylus, followed by essays on each of the extant plays (including *Prometheus*).
- Sommerstein 2010: The most comprehensive introduction to Aeschylus, covering the poet’s life and career, the extant plays, and the larger general themes in his work. Also very good on the lost plays.
- Taplin 1977: An introductory essay on the overall problems of staging Aeschylus, followed by discussion of the problems in each of the extant comedies.

- Winnington-Ingram 1983: A collection of important essays on Aeschylus by one of the leading dramatic scholars of the last century.

Sophokles

- Goldhill and Hall 2009: A collection of thirteen essays, offering an introductory overview of the critical tradition in Sophoklean scholarship, four studies on a particular plays, and several chapters on the reception of Sophokles.
- Griffin 1999: A collection of twelve essays offering studies of thematic issues in Sophoklean tragedy, focused studies on a particular play, and three essays on the plays' reception.
- Ormand 2012: Thirty-eight newly commissioned essays on Sophokles, his plays, techniques, and his engagement with religious, political and contemporary thought as well as gender and sexuality in his plays. Highly recommended.
- Segal 1981: Defines structuralism's approach to myth and tragedy and demonstrates its applicability by offering engaging and insightful reading of all of Sophokles' extant plays.
- Winnington-Ingram 1980: A collection of insightful essays that reveal Sophokles as not the serene and optimistic dramatist, but as one whose world-view is deeply and tragically ironic.

Euripides

- Burnett 1971: A study of seven Euripidean plays where the tragic catastrophe is averted, although the possibility for tragedy is never completely absent and a mixed feeling is always present.
- Conacher 1967: Even after more than forty years, still required reading for students of Euripides. Conacher studies what Euripides has done with the received mythical tradition and the consequences for appreciating his plays.
- Cropp, Lee, and Sansone 2000: Papers of a conference (1999) that cover "tragedy and other genres," "myth and religion," and "performance and reception." Studies of a high quality by the leaders in the field.
- Michelini 1987: A very useful study of how others have read Euripides, and how Euripides re-used the traditional material to shock his audience. Four plays (*Hecuba*, *Herakles*, *Hippolytos*, *Elektra*) are considered in detail.
- Mitchell-Boyask 2002: Intended for instructors in the field and for students approaching Euripides for the first time. Covers general and practical matters, as well as specific plays and issues.
- Mossman 2003: A selection of seventeen previously published and well-regarded essays both on general topics concerning Euripides and on nine of his extant plays.

The Satyr-Drama

In the fifth century tragic poets would present three tragedies (connected or unconnected) and then a fourth play, called in the official records “Satyrs.” **Satyr-drama** is often lost in the excitement over the more serious tragedies, and when it is considered, it is seen as a pleasant way to cheer up an emotionally drained audience, as an amusing engagement with more serious tragic or epic originals, or as a moral analogy about personal behavior and responsibilities. Rarely is the satyr-drama seen as complementing or completing the tragic production, although in 467 **Aeschylus’** Theban plays, *Laïos*, *Oedipus*, *Seven*, were followed by *Sphinx*, very much part of the myth of Oedipus. In 458 *Proteus* followed *Oresteia*, dramatizing the adventures of Menelaos in Egypt, and the satyr-drama for “The Daughters of Danaos” was *Amymone*, named after one the daughters. On the other side of the ledger, satyr-dramas clearly amused the spectators by making fun out of the serious stories of epic and tragedy, but is laughter not the “end” of comedy? Satyr-drama becomes an uncomfortable hybrid, being both tragic and comic, and neither.

Satyrs are creatures that partake of the divine, the human, and the animal. In later antiquity and subsequent Western culture they are shown as a cross between men and goats, rather like a lesser Pan-figure. But on Athenian vases of the archaic and classical period satyrs are humanoid creatures with the bushy tail of a horse, pointed ears, snub noses and high foreheads, beards, and sometimes a massively erect phallus. Technically *satyros* (“satyr”) is a creature of the Peloponnese, while the Athenians called these beings *silēnoi* (“silens”), but the terms seem to be used interchangeably, with the father of the satyrs in satyr-drama called Silenos (or Pappasilenos) and the beasts themselves *satyroi* (as at *Cyclops* 100: “we see this gathering of satyrs”).

Satyrs were creatures of the appetites; their principal desires were for drink, food, sex, and money. Theirs was a certain primitive cunning, and to catch a satyr or a silen

was something lucky, like capturing a leprechaun in modern folklore. They were divine beings, yet lower than men in intelligence, animal-like in their passions, and there was a sense of magic about them. In drama they are present when monsters are fought, marvelous inventions discovered, heroes or gods born. They are essentially pleasure-loving and cowards – when Odysseus asks their help in blinding the Cyclops, each one finds an excuse not to take part (*Cyclops* 624–55). Singing and dancing, having fun and playing jokes, eating and drinking, pursuing women, these are the activities of the satyrs. When the satyrs present themselves as suitors for the daughter of Oineus (or perhaps Schoineus), in a satyr-drama that *may* be by **Sophokles**, their self-description is:

We are here as suitors, we are children of the nymphs, servants of Dionysos, companions of the gods. We are fit for every suitable trade: combat with the spear; contests of wrestling, riding, running, boxing, biting, testicle twisting. We have songs of music, oracles secret and not false, diagnosis of diseases; we can measure the sky, dance, and make rude noises down below. (Sophokles F 1130)

In both myth and art satyrs appear as the male companions of Dionysos, often shown with and pursuing the **maenads**, Dionysos' female followers. The maenads, however, rarely seem to be in any danger, and part of the humor of the satyrs is their inability to achieve their desires.

They are free spirits of the wild, and much of the dramatic fun occurs when these creatures are pent up or forced into a regulated routine, as at *Cyclops* 25–6: “instead of our joyful riots we tend sheep for the evil Cyclops.” The mountain-goddess Kyllene in Sophokles' *Trackers* wonders why the satyrs have given up their service of Dionysos for the pursuit of hunting, and in Aeschylus' *Spectators* Dionysos upbraids them for leaving him to take up the life of an athlete. Thus there was something innately humorous and incongruous about satyrs working at the jobs of ordered humanity. When Odysseus at *Cyclops* 99 exclaims “we seem to have entered a city of Dionysos,” he is uttering a contradiction, for Dionysos and his satyrs are essentially creatures of the wild and the unregulated life. The setting of a satyr-drama is rarely a palace or civilized community, but rather places where the satyrs belong: a mountain (*Trackers*, *Judgement*), the seashore (*Net-Haulers*, *Proteus*), a cave (*Cyclops*).

Dressing up as satyrs was part of the festival of Dionysos called the Anthesteria (in mid February), and it is not surprising that a dramatic form based on satyrs should develop from frolicking bands of men and boys dressed as satyrs. The well-known Pronomos Vase (fig. 3.1), which seems to be the equivalent of the cast-photograph of a modern production, shows us what performers in a satyr-drama looked like at the end of the fifth century. The *aulos*-player (Pronomos), the poet (Demetrios), and Charinos (the *chorēgos*?) are prominently presented, while the names beside the satyrs are those of the human performers. Here we see eleven members of a satyr chorus, most holding their masks, one fully dressed and rehearsing his routine. Their costume is scanty, a full head-mask with beard, snub-nose, high forehead, and pointed ears; a wreath appropriate to the festive occasion; a full horse's tail; and a pair of furry briefs with a small erect phallus (fig. 3.2). Even allowing for the wearing of a body stocking,



Figure 3.1 *The Pronomos Vase. Characters in a satyr-drama on a red-figure volute-krater, ca. 400. Reproduced courtesy of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples 81673 (H3240).*



Figure 3.2 *Performers in a satyr-drama, on an Apulian bell-krater by the Taporley Painter, early fourth century. Reproduced courtesy of the Nicholson Museum, Sydney (47.05).*

it cannot have been that warm in late March, even by early afternoon when the satyr-drama would have been performed, and that may in part account for the short length of the play (*Cyclops* is barely 700 lines).

Aristotle says at *Poetics* 1449a that tragedy evolved from “small plots and ridiculous (*geloios*) language, since it developed from a *saytrikon*.” This is at odds with his earlier distinction that tragedy belongs to serious (*spoudaios*) poetry and comedy to the ridiculous (*geloios*) and also that tragedy developed from the **dithyramb**, since there is no evidence that dithyramb was ever a humorous form or performed by satyrs. Aristotle is talking at this point about the size and grandeur of primitive tragedy and may just mean that primitive tragedy was a lesser and disorganized form of drama, perhaps adducing satyr-drama as the closest parallel. “*Satyrikon*” would thus mean “a satyr-like thing,” rather than “satyr-drama.” Since the evidence suggests that satyr-drama was added to the festival later than tragedy, at the time of the re-organization ca. 501, this cannot mean that tragedy developed from the satyr-drama and that satyr-drama is thus a surviving relic of an earlier form.

Why satyr-drama? There is no real problem mixing genres at a dramatic performance. In modern culture we are familiar with warm-up acts in music, cartoons and

newsreels at the cinema, light overtures before the main work at the concert hall. But these tend to precede the *pièce de resistance*, not follow. Why put something after tragedy? Zenobius (second century AD) quotes a proverb, “nothing to do with Dionysos,” connecting this to the history of drama. Tragedy, he alleges, after its introduction by **Thespis** in 534 had moved away from portraying the stories of Dionysos and was turning to other myths that had “nothing to do with Dionysos.” Satyr-drama was added to retain an essential connection with the god of the festival and the spirit of revel and abandon that Dionysos embodies. But this sounds suspiciously as though it were made up to explain the proverb, and assumes an intrinsic and original connection between tragedy and Dionysos.

Our evidence for satyr-drama in the fifth century consists of one complete play, *Cyclops* by **Euripides**, over 400 lines on papyrus from Sophokles’ *Trackers*, substantial bits of Aeschylus’ *Net-Haulers* and his *Spectators or Isthmians*, and various other excerpts and quotations. We can identify about a dozen plays by Aeschylus as satyric, perhaps eighteen to twenty by Sophokles, and again about a dozen for Euripides. The following specific dates and titles are reasonably secure:

Satyr-Dramas (Secure Dates)

- 472: Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Fire-Lighter*
- 467: Aeschylus’ *Sphinx*; Pratinas’ *Wrestlers*
- 466–59: Aeschylus’ *Amymone*
- 458: Aeschylus’ *Proteus*
- 438: Euripides’ *Alkestis* (extant, but lacking a chorus of satyrs)
- 431: Euripides’ *Harvesters*
- 415: Euripides’ *Sisyphos*; Xenokles’ *Athamas*

Aeschylus’ *Lykourgos* was the satyr-drama in a Lykourgos-tetralogy (460s?), and good arguments place his *Net-Haulers* with two tragedies on the family of Perseus (*Daughters of Phorkys*, *Polydeuktes*), and his *Kirke* with a supposed trilogy on Odysseus. Some have grouped Sophokles’ *Trackers* (with a search scene) with his *Ajax* (where the Greeks search for Ajax), and Euripides’ *Cyclops* with *Hecuba*, since in each a villainous character is blinded.

From these remains we can make the following observations about the nature of satyr-drama, keeping in mind that the genre will have changed and developed over the fifth century, as indeed did tragedy (or any other living art form). First satyrs formed the chorus and their father Silenos was a character. Silenos may well have begun as the chorus-leader, speaking for his children, but by the time of Aeschylus’ *Net-Haulers* (probably between 469 and 456) he is a separate character in his own right. In satyr-drama the satyrs are playful creatures of the appetites (money, sex, food, wine) and they make much of their carryings-on, especially their singing and dancing. They are often out of their element, in captivity (as in the *Cyclops* and *Trackers*) or forced to work. Remember that there is something innately funny about satyrs engaged in the human routine. These plays can thus become a rescue and escape, the sort of

tragedy of which Euripides was so fond – at the end of *Cyclops* the satyrs will with the aid of Odysseus return to the service of Dionysos. This rescue and escape often involves a monster or evil human villain – the Cyclops, Bousiris (who killed travelers), the Sphinx, Proteus the shape-shifter – who will be overcome and sometimes killed. Here the theme of hospitality and its abuse, so familiar from the *Odyssey*, frequently plays a large role.

The defeat of the monster and the escape of both hero (e.g., Odysseus in *Cyclops*, Oedipus in *Sphinx*) and chorus will often be accomplished by cleverness or deceit: getting the Cyclops drunk or declaring “My name is Nobody,” solving the riddle of the Sphinx, penetrating the mystery of the backward footprints in *Trackers*. Satyr-dramas have also a strong element of athletics and a contest – solving the Sphinx’ riddle is a sort of contest, F 282 of Euripides’ *Autolykos* is an indictment of athletes (obviously an athletic theme was part of this play), and Aeschylus’ *Spectators* shows the satyrs abandoning their wild pursuit of Dionysos for the organized routine of the athletic ground. Sophokles’ *Judgment* made satyr-drama out of the famous Judgment of Paris and the enticements offered by the goddesses.

Magic and the miraculous have a large part in the satyr-drama. In Euripides’ *Autolykos* the arch-thief Autolykos was able to disguise his thefts by substituting an ass for a war-horse or Silenos for a pretty maiden. The witch Kirke was the title character in that satyr-drama by Aeschylus, and *Proteus* will have featured the shape-shifting prophet, familiar from the fourth book of the *Odyssey*. A character in Sophokles’ *Inachos* wears Hades’ cap of invisibility. The overall flavor of satyr-drama is very much like that of European folk-tale: defeat of evil, a black-and-white universe, cleverness and trickery, the happy ending against all odds. Strange and marvelous items can be found in satyr-drama: the satyrs must have been present at the invention of fire in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Fire-Lighter*; in *Trackers* the satyrs are terrified by the sound of the newly invented lyre; and in Euripides’ *Eurystheus* someone (Silenos?) is impressed by the statutes of Daedalos which can almost move and talk.

The birth and raising of gods or heroes was another repeated theme for satyr-drama. *Trackers* uses the story in *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* of the birth of that god and his theft of Apollo’s cattle on the day he was born. Two of Sophokles’ satyr-dramas were called *Young Dionysos* and *Young Herakles* – the divine parentage and miraculous birth of each would make for good drama. In *Net-Haulers* Silenos muses to the baby Perseus about his future life with him and the satyrs.

Romance too has its place, for one of the satyrs’ appetites is for sex, witness their questioning of Odysseus about Helen (*Cyclops* 175–87), their appearance as a suitor for Oineus’ (or Schoineus’) daughter, and Silenos’ intention of marrying Danae in the *Net-Haulers*. In Sophokles’ *Achilles’ Lovers* it seems that the satyrs were offering themselves as the lovers of the youthful Achilles. The Pronomos Vase (see fig. 3.1) shows four characters from a satyr-drama by a poet named Demetrios: Silenos, Herakles, an older man, and a younger woman. It has been plausibly suggested that the play involved some sort of triangular romantic plot: the older man, his daughter, and Herakles, perhaps the satyr-drama, attributed to Sophokles, in which the satyrs court Oineus’ (Schoineus’) daughter. At the end of F 1130 the father defers the suit of the satyrs to welcome “this man who is coming,” perhaps Herakles? Griffith (2002: 232)

observes that it is not the satyrs who get the girl, but the hero and that as many as fourteen satyr-dramas are known to have had a “romantic” ending.

Unlike comedy, satyr-drama maintains the dramatic illusion and does not engage the audience directly. While its language and meter are freer than in tragedy, they do not approach the freedom and colloquialism of comedy. For example, the abundant sexual vocabulary of comedy is not found in satyr-drama. When the satyrs ask Odysseus about the Greeks’ treatment of Helen (*Cyclops* 180), they use a sexual euphemism “did you all knock her?,” rather than comedy’s blunt *binein* (“fuck”), and nor do we find the direct term *peos* (“prick”) at *Net-Haulers* 795, but *posthos* (“the baby is a willy-lover”). The human heroes, as far as we can tell, and it is certainly true of Odysseus in *Cyclops*, come off far better than their counterparts in comic parody. Odysseus must be a worthy champion to counter the Cyclops, and not the butt of the humor. That role is left to Silenos and the satyrs. But while satyr-drama makes fun out of tragedy or epic, it would not be fair to call this “parody.” The distortion and the bite of parody is best left to comedy.

Although it was meant to be funny, satyr-drama has closer affinities to tragedy than it does to comedy, and not just because it was written by the tragedian and performed by his company. Its plots and characters are drawn from epic and tragedy, its language, while vulgar, is not crude, and its costumes (satyrs apart) are those of tragedy. Aristotle in *Poetics* distinguishes between the “high” style (**Homer’s** *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) in which tragedy shared and the “low” style (burlesque of epic and the poetry of abuse) which the comedians followed. One suspects that, if pushed, he would have included satyr-drama in the former category. Demetrius (*On Style* 169 – third century?) writes that “no-one would contemplate a *tragōidian paizousan* (‘tragedy kidding around’), since he would be writing satyr-drama rather than tragedy.” But Horace makes it clear that satyr-drama is not comedy, since “it will not be appropriate for gods or heroes, who have just appeared in royal gold and purple, to move into dark taverns with common speech. Tragedy is not happy to chatter in light verse, and like a lady made to dance on holidays, will have little desire to mingle with lustful satyrs” (*Art of Poetry* 227–33). A revealing fifth-century *oinochoe* in the Ashmolean Museum shows a satyr approaching a resting maenad, labeled “Tragedy” (fig. 3.3).

Satyr-drama thus belongs in the same universe as tragedy, with the same plots and heroes. What it adds is the happy ending, the themes of folk-tale, and of course satyrs. Lissarrague (1990: 236) puts it well: “the recipe is as follows: take one myth, add the satyrs, and observe the result.” Figures such as Odysseus or Oedipus or Menelaos maintain the “high” level of tragedy, and they are the ones who defeat the monster and create the happy ending. The satyrs provide the “low” level. We laugh at their ineffectual antics, but perhaps with a fond exasperation, since they have our sympathy and we appreciate that they will share in the happy ending.

But what did satyr-drama add to the tragic performances? The most common explanation is that satyr-drama provided a relief after the serious emotion of three tragedies, and certainly laughter will have lightened the mass atmosphere appreciably. But why satyr-drama and not comedy? And why link satyr-drama so strongly with tragedy, if all that was required was laughter? Critics offer a variety of explanations: satyr-drama as attacking or subverting tragedy, satyr-drama as reinforcing the world



Figure 3.3 *Depiction of Satyr and maenad. Red-figure oinochoe. Reproduced courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology (AN1896–1908 G.284).*

of tragedy, satyr-drama as looking at the same universe as tragedy but from a lighter point of view, satyr-drama as a sort of “dessert” to tragedy, satyr-drama as completing tragedy, that both tragedy and satyr-drama provided a view of the *polis* and its issues, but from different aspects.

All of these explanations have something to commend them. Satyr-drama may well have provided a welcome relief after the three engaging and emotional experiences, or the “dessert” for the tragic banquet. It may have subverted tragedy, as many suggest, or equally well may have maintained the world of tragedy, but showing its characters and themes in a less serious light. Satyrs behaved like children or irresponsible young men, and the spectators may have been treated to a tempting world of eternal fun, where responsibilities and daily routine are discarded, where like the Lost Boys in Neverland, the satyrs engage in their endless dreams of irresponsible pleasure, dreams which are nice as dreams, but which for the audience will fade before the return of reality.

The man traditionally associated with “inventing” the satyr-drama was Pratinas (*TrGF* 4) of Phleios in the Peloponnese, but more probably his was the first formal

production of the satyr-drama at the festival at Athens. He is credited with thirty-two satyr-dramas out of a total of fifty plays. If the other eighteen represent six tragic productions of three plays each, then only six of these thirty-two satyr-dramas were part of formal presentations at the Dionysia. If Pratinas came to Athens in the late sixth century, when artists of various kinds were frequenting the court of the **tyrants**, it may have been he who made a distinct dramatic form of the irregular and unorganized satyr-performances.

We have a fragment of Pratinas (F 3), which, if satyric (and there is some debate here), would be the earliest surviving piece of Western drama:

What commotion is this? What are these dance-steps? What outrage has reached the noisy altar of Dionysos. Bromios is mine, mine! I'm the one who should shout and stamp, rushing over the mountain with the Nymphs, singing a song like a swan with dappled wings. The Muse put song in charge – let the pipe dance behind, for it is a servant. The pipe may want to command revels and sparring-matches of drunken young men outside someone's door. Strike the one with the breath of a dappled toad, burn the spit-consuming reed with its garrulous groan, its body shaped by the augur, that goes against the melody and the rhythm. Hey, over here – this is how you thrust out your arms and feet. Lord of the dithyramb, with ivy in your hair, hear my Dorian dance-song.

Athenaios, who quotes the fragment, tells us that the context is a chorus' protest against the domination of the dance by the accompanying *aulos*. The singers seem to be refusing to perform to the *aulos* and to be demonstrating how a dance for Dionysos should be performed. Remember that the *aulos* enjoyed an ambiguous reputation in classical Athens, as the appropriate musical accompaniment for "revels and sparring matches of drunken young men" and also for the dramatic and dithyrambic performances. The Athenians knew the story of how Athene threw away the *aulos* because playing it distorted her appearance. Other traditions clearly portray the *kithara* ("lyre") as morally superior to the *aulos* and speak of musicians being "converted" to the lyre. The song, however, does not seem to be part of a dramatic situation, but rather an extradramatic appeal to the spectators and the *aulos*-player. Is this compatible with a fragment of such an early date?

Certain tragic poets had a reputation for their satyr-dramas. Pratinas and his son Archytas (*TrGF* 9) are so recognized, while Menedemos (fourth century) ranked Achaïos (*TrGF* 20) second only to Aeschylus. This judgment may surprise those who are accustomed to viewing Aeschylus through the lens of **Aristophanes'** caricature in *Frogs* as an august and austere poetic personality. We need to see in him both a creator of grand tragedy and a master of the satyric response. We can say something in detail about two of Aeschylus' lost satyr-dramas. First the two fragments of *Net-Haulers* show a scene where Diktys and Silenos have sighted in the waves the chest that contains Danae and her infant son Perseus and call for assistance in bringing it ashore, an appeal answered by the satyrs. The other fragment comes from the latter part of the play – a numerical note in the margin reveals that we have lines 765–832, where Silenos has proposed marriage to a very unwilling Danae and plays with the baby Perseus, telling him of the life he will lead with Silenos and the satyrs. At 832 lines this play is already one-sixth again as long as *Cyclops*, and unless the play ended with

the **anapests** of the chorus celebrating the union of Danae and Silenos, hardly a conventional happy ending, there was at least one major scene to go in which Danae and Perseus were rescued from the satyrs. *Cyclops* may be atypically short or perhaps satyr-dramas grew shorter with age. *Spectators* is interesting for the satyrs' desertion of Dionysos for the pursuit of athletics, for Dionysos' castigation of them for leaving their accustomed life, and especially for their wonder at masks of satyrs, "this craft of Daidalos that lacks only a voice." **Metatheater** is an over-worked term, but a chorus of masked satyrs calling attention to masks of satyrs does push at the dramatic illusion.

One of the most important papyrus discoveries of the last century was that of some 400 lines of Sophokles' *Trackers*. We have the first part of the play, which dramatized the story of the birth of Hermes on Mount Kyllene, his invention of the lyre, and the theft of Apollo's cattle, told charmingly in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. To this familiar tale add satyrs, Silenos, and observe the results. We have an opening speech by Apollo where he proclaims a reward for assistance in recovering his lost cattle, a golden wreath and freedom for the satyrs. The satyrs, puzzled by the backward tracks which they sniff out ("lying on the ground like a hedgehog in a bush"), and startled by a strange sound, adopt their usual role at the approach of danger (F 314.145–51):

Silenos: Why are you so afraid and frightened at a sound . . . you look fearfully at every shadow, terrified of everything, you disordered followers without backbone or resource, just bodies to look at with tongues and phalluses.

Kyllene, the goddess of the Mountain, explains that this is the sound of a lyre, the invention of a newborn god, Hermes, now six days old and already a youth, made from the shell of a tortoise and strings of cow hide. The satyrs are convinced that this newborn god must be the cattle thief, but Kyllene refuses to entertain such charges against a young child. At this point the papyrus breaks off. Presumably the youthful Hermes will have enchanted his brother Apollo with the gift of the lyre, and the satyrs will not have received their desired reward.

In Aeschylus the satyr-drama seems to have been more relevant to the trilogies it accompanied. Griffith (1995: 75 n.52) puts it wittily, "The show isn't over until the satyrs have sung." The last play of the Theban production (467) was appropriately *Sphinx*, and *Oresteia* was followed by *Proteus*. In the last instance the disappearance of Menelaos and his ships is mentioned by the messenger at *Agamemnon* 636–80 and we know from *Odyssey* 4 that an encounter between Proteus and Menelaos occurred during his subsequent travels. The plays about Dionysos in Thrace, known as the "Lykourgos-tetralogy," have a satyr-drama called *Lykourgos*. From the fragments we have of Aeschylus and the other early dramatists, the satyrs and Silenos seem to have more to do with the plot than in Euripides. It is more than just add satyrs, it is mix them well in. In what we have of Sophokles' *Trackers*, the satyrs do engage directly with Kyllene, but in *Cyclops* they and Silenos are pushed to the edges of the action, as the principal engagement is between two of the actors, Odysseus and the Cyclops. In Euripides the *polis*, especially the contemporary *polis*, intrudes considerably on the scene. The Cyclops seems quite conversant with contemporary sophistry, preaching

a doctrine of pragmatic self-interest and rejection of the gods. In *Autolykos* (F 282) the speaker criticizes “this custom of the Greeks” to honor athletes, for no athlete “by winning a crown has ever really helped his city,” while someone in his *Skiron* (F 676) mentions Corinthian prostitutes and their fondness for Athenian “maidens” (coins with the head of Athene).

In 438 Euripides departs significantly from normal practice. We possess the fourth play of that production, his *Alkestis*, but here there are neither satyrs nor Silenos. Critics are at a loss how to classify *Alkestis*. It is certainly not satyr-drama, nor is it comedy for the myth and characters are those of tragedy, nor is there any rupture of the dramatic illusion or address to the audience. Did Euripides then just write four tragedies that year and should we then treat Admetos as any other tragic protagonist? But the world of *Alkestis* is not that of tragedy. Although Apollo does speak the prologue, this is not the universe of the Olympians. Death here is not Hades, brother of Zeus, but Thanatos, the Grim Reaper of popular folk culture. This is a universe where a god may be enjoined to serve a mortal, where that mortal can escape Death by finding a substitute victim, where Herakles can wrestle with Death and rescue the dead woman. It is the world of European folk-tale. It has the happy ending, the presence of Herakles, a favorite figure in the satyr-drama, much to do with entertaining and hospitality, a monster (Death) to be overcome, but no satyrs. For whatever reason Euripides chose not to write a conventional satyr-drama that year and thus as early as 438 we can witness a departure from the more vital role that satyr-drama seems to have had for Aeschylus. The next year (437) the comedian Kallias staged a comedy called *Satyrs*, perhaps providing in comedy the chorus that was missing from the previous year’s tragic production. **Kratinos’** comedy *Dionysalexandros*, in which Dionysos replaced Alexandros (Paris) for the famous Judgment, likewise had a chorus of satyrs. This play has also been dated to 437, in which case we would have two instances of comedy engaging with satyr-drama.

Sutton (1980) argued that the plays of Euripides we call “escape plays” or “Romantic Tragedy” were further experiments with the fourth position, but this is unlikely, because Euripides produced two of these plays in 412 (*Helen*, *Andromeda*). One would have to have been a “real” tragedy. Because of the black humor in the final scene and the supposedly “happy” ending, Sophokles’ *Elektra* was implausibly suggested to be “pro-satyrical,” and if *Rhesos* is in fact by Euripides, the best explanation of its strangeness is that it was an early experiment with the fourth play.

We know very little about satyr-drama in the first half of the fourth century. An inscription tells us that in 340 BC the festival opened with a single satyr-drama, while the tragedians presented only two new tragedies each. The satyr-drama on that occasion was Timokles’ *Lykourgos*, Timokles being an intriguing figure in the history of Greek drama in that he may have written tragedy, comedy, and satyr-drama. Satyr-drama by the 320s was acquiring some of the traditional features of comedy, at a time when comedy was becoming more domestic and much less topical. A fragment of Astydamos the younger, in the eupolidean meter (a meter of Old Comedy), breaks the dramatic illusion by mentioning the poet and his audience. An extraordinary play, *Agen* by Python (called a “little satyr-drama” by Athenaios), was performed for Alexander and his army in the east in 324, making fun of real persons, including

Harpalos, a powerful figure in Alexander's court, and containing the return from the dead of Pythionike, Harpalos' mistress. Timokles' *Satyr of Ikaria*, contains some vivid passages of personal humor, very much in the spirit of Old Comedy, and this is usually considered as comedy. But some have argued that this too is a satyr-drama, again showing the appropriation of comic elements by satyr-drama.

Cyclops

The one complete satyr-drama that we possess is Euripides' *Cyclops*, included in the alphabetical list of plays on the Laurentian manuscript (L). It is a burlesque, not of tragedy, but of the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops related in *Odyssey* 9. Homer's plot-line featured the encounter between Odysseus and his sailors with the man-eating monster, the abuse of hospitality between guest and host, imprisonment in the cave, the trickery of Odysseus, and his escape and revelation of his true identity. To this Euripides adds Silenos and the satyrs for a comic result. Dionysos has been captured by Italian pirates. Silenos and the satyrs have journeyed west to rescue him, but have fallen into the clutches of the Cyclops and forced to tend his flocks on Mount Etna. They live a joyless life, no singing and dancing, and above all no wine, for this Cyclops has no knowledge or experience with the greatest gift of Dionysos.

The principal difference with the story as told in *Odyssey* 9, apart from the presence of the satyrs, is that this Cyclops is no savage monster. He prepares and cooks his food and is quite conversant with sophistic techniques of thinking and debating. In his speech at lines 316–46 he sounds like a comic version of a contemporary materialist and hedonistic philosopher:

I sacrifice to none of the gods, except myself, and to the greatest of deities, my stomach.
To eat and drink all day long and never to feel any pain, that is Zeus for intelligent men.
Those who have complicated human life by passing laws, I tell them to piss off. And I
shall not leave off indulging my soul. How? By eating you. (334–41)

Much is made of the godlessness of the Cyclops' behavior and of his punishment for his actions by Odysseus. The Cyclops in Homer is more beast than conscious human agent, but here we see divine vengeance wrought upon one who has behaved in an "unholy" fashion.

Homer's Cyclops is acquainted with wine, but is overcome by a surpassingly strong and sweet vintage. Euripides' monster knows nothing about wine, for at lines 223–8 he mistakes the wine-induced flush on Silenos' cheeks for the signs of a physical beating. Satyr-dramas often contain inventions of marvelous items; in this case the invention is wine, new to the Cyclops at least. There is no clever escape from the cave, since a drama must be played in the open, nor is the line "Nobody is hurting me" spoken to his fellow Cyclopes, but to a jeering and unsympathetic chorus. The play ends abruptly with Odysseus revealing his name and the Cyclops remembering an ancient prophecy that "I would lose my sight at your hands after you had left Troy"

and threatening that “you will pay for this by wandering on the sea for many years” (697–700). The chorus closes this brief drama (709 lines) by declaring that they will join Odysseus’ crew and “serve Bacchos forever.”

The date of this satyr-drama is much disputed. The percentage of resolution in the **iambic** trimeters is reasonably high (35 percent); comparison with the figures for tragedy would suggest a date after 412. But the metrical technique of *Cyclops* is much freer than tragedy in other respects, and we should not put too much trust in this sort of evidence. Two dates in particular have been advanced with some enthusiasm. In the second half of Euripides’ *Hecuba*, usually dated in the mid 420s (often to 425), a cruel barbarian ruler (Polymestor) is blinded as an act of vengeance that involves a trick. It is argued that *Cyclops* would have been an appropriate satyr-drama to accompany this tragedy. Seaford (1984) proposed a date in the early 410s, both from the metrical evidence and from an odd expression at the end of the play. The blinded Cyclops proposes to climb to the top of the cliff “through this tunnel.” As the only other use of the word for “tunnel” (literally “pierced through”) occurs in the prologue of Sophokles’ *Philoktetes* (dated 409) of his seaside cave, it might seem reasonable that these two dramas should be close in time and reflect a particular convention of staging. In that case it would have been produced in the aftermath of the disastrous Sicilian campaign, when Athenian prisoners were brutally treated by their Sicilian captors.

Euripides’ play was not the only drama of the fifth century to present a burlesque involving the Cyclops. A *Cyclops* is attributed to Epicharmos, the Syracusan comic poet of the early fifth century, and burlesque of myth was an important part of his comedy. Aristias, the son of Pratinas (the traditional founder of satyr-drama), also wrote a *Cyclops*, of which one line survives – his career belongs to the 470s and 460s. Of more interest is Kratinos’ lost comedy, *Odysseus and Friends*, plausibly dated to 439–437, of which enough remains to confirm that it was a close parody of *Odyssey* 9, including the use of wine and the trick of Odysseus’ name (“come, take this wine and drink it, and ask me my name,” F 145). Like the Euripidean Cyclops this creature takes care over the preparation of his food:

And so I will take all you faithful comrades, roast you, boil you, grill you over coals, dip you into salt and vinegar and warm garlic-sauce. Whichever of you soldiers seems to be the best cooked, him I shall devour. (F 150)

Euripides’ satyr-drama on the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops likely belongs to the latter part of his career, and is thus later than Kratinos’ comedy. In this instance one may entertain seriously the possibility that comedy influenced a tragic poet.

Recommended Reading

- Griffith 2002: A comprehensive article summarizing previous interpretations of the satyr-drama and investigating how the ancient audience would have been both sympathetic to and repulsed by these creatures.

- Harrison 2005: A collection of twelve conference papers (2003), principally (but not exclusively) concerned with *Cyclops* and *Alkestis*.
- O'Sullivan and Collard (2013): An introduction, text + English translation, and commentary to *Cyclops* and other major fragments of satyr-drama.
- Seaford 1984: A Greek text plus commentary of Euripides' *Cyclops*, prefaced with a thorough and illuminating survey of the characteristics of satyr-drama.
- Sutton 1980: The fullest introduction to satyr-drama.

Greek Comedy

With *tragōidia* (goat-song) the problem lay not with the basic meaning of *tragos* (“goat”), but with its implications (“song of the goats,” “song for the goat,” “song over the goat”). With *kōmōidia* (“comedy”) the question is which Greek word generated the first part of the term. In antiquity three etymologies were presented: *kōma* + *ōdē* (“sleep-song”), *kōmē* + *ōdē* (“village-song”), or *kōmos* + *ōdē* (“revel-song”). According to **Aristotle** (*Poetics* 1448a35), those who believed that comedy was a creation of the **Dorian** Greeks favored “village-song” on the ground that *kōmē* (“village”) was a Dorian word, the Athenian term being *dēmos*. But it seems virtually certain that comedy derives its name from *kōmos* + *ōdē* (“revel-song”), the exuberant celebration common to human civilizations of any time or place. Comedy, like tragedy and **satyr-drama**, comes originally from a choral performance. In his *Poetics* (chapter 6) Aristotle defines the particular emotions of tragedy’s appeal as pity and fear. He promises a subsequent discussion of comedy, which either was not written or did not survive, and one wonders what he would have defined as the particular emotions for comedy (pleasure and laughter, anger and indignation?).

Origins

One is tempted to agree with Aristotle (*Poetics* 1449a38) that “because it was not taken seriously, the origins of comedy have been forgotten” and leave the discussion of comedy’s pre-history at that. Unlike tragedy, with Old Comedy we are confronted with one surviving dramatist, **Aristophanes** (career: 427 to ca. 385), whose *début* is sixty years after comedy received official recognition at the **City Dionysia**. To start from Aristophanes and to investigate the origins of comedy or to appreciate Old

Comedy as a whole would be like trying to write a history of classical music based largely on the works of Mozart or of twentieth-century cinema beginning with the movies of Alfred Hitchcock. We have no conclusive evidence for what would develop into Old Comedy in the early fifth century or for what stages it went through before becoming the highly political and topical comedy of the 420s.

But because academics, like nature, abhor a vacuum, one must say something about the early history of comedy, especially as we have some tantalizing bits of evidence that allow the curtain to be even slightly lifted. The evidence comes from three different sources: (a) the literary statements of Aristotle and other ancient commentators, (b) the physical evidence from vases and sculpture, and (c) the conclusions that one may draw from the surviving comedies, the play-titles and major fragments, although these belong later in the history of the genre.

Aristotle (*Poetics* 1448b29–1449b20) makes the following points about the early development of comedy. First Athenian comedy may have had a Dorian origin, partly because of the existence of something called Megarian comedy – there were two Dorian cities called Megara, one that bordered on Attica and the other in Sicily – partly because of the known poet Epicharmos active in the Dorian community of **Syracuse**, and partly because of the claim that *kōmōidia* is *kōmē* + *ōdē*, *kōmē* being the Dorian word for “village.” Second, both comedy and tragedy derive genealogically from **Homer**, tragedy from the serious epics (*Iliad*, *Odyssey*) and comedy from the burlesque *Margites* attributed to Homer. Third, while tragedy comes from those who led the **dithyramb**, comedy comes from “those who led the phallic songs,” and did so through an evolution from improvisation to formal performance, the stages of which are unknown. Finally early comedy shared much with *iambos*, the poetry of personal insult, and only later developed what we would call plots.

Aristotle’s comments do not give us great cause for optimism, since he seems to be providing at least two different traditions about comedy: something which evolved from primitive phallic-songs, and also an art form that developed as a literary genre. That comedy is “revel-song” may be nothing more than a reasonable observation based on the parades (*kōmoî*) that marked many Greek festivals, and the statement about phallic-songs as the ancestor of comedy could just be Aristotle’s extrapolation from his conclusion that tragedy arose from those who led the dithyramb. If Aristotle did have reasonable evidence for the latter, he may have sought a similar ancestor for comedy and found it in the “phallic-songs,” without any real evidence to support this conclusion. Handley’s (1985: 111) summary takes us as far as we can go: “Aristotle’s derivation of comedy is a hypothesis which is interesting and possibly correct, but he does not offer, and we cannot adequately supply, the means by which it might be verified.”

The later writers on comedy provide little of any value. They are singularly unoriginal and uncritical, and present as fact certain tales and stereotypes about comedy: that comedy was the creation of certain farmers to publicize the wrongs done to them by townspeople, that the quintessence of Old Comedy is personal humor (*to onomasti kōmōidein*), that comedy has three firm and distinct divisions (Old, Middle, and New), and that changes in comedy were largely due to outside political forces. Their etymology of *kōmōidia* is usually *kōmē* + *ōdē* (“village-song”), although the derivation from *kōmos* + *ōdē* (“revel-song”) does occur as well.



Figure 4.1 *Padded dancers on a sixth-century Corinthian aryballos, in the Department of Ancient History and Classics, Trent University. Photo by I.C. Storey.*

The visual evidence consists principally of some sixth-century vases containing scenes and characters that have been viewed as the ancestors of Old Comedy. Around twenty vases dating from 560–480 show groups of men dressed up as beasts, performing on some public occasion. Are these animal choruses the sort of “volunteer performance” that Aristotle describes as the precursor of formal comedy? These vases often feature a piper with these costumed men, a clear sign that a performance is being depicted, and show men dressed as cocks, men riding dolphins or ostriches, men in armor mounted on other men disguised as horses – here Aristophanes’ *Knights* is invariably cited with the intriguing possibility that in Aristophanes’ comedy that chorus appeared as twelve pairs of riders-and-mounts. Some Old Comedies do have theriomorphic choruses: *Birds*, Krates’ *Beasts*, **Kratinos’** *Chirons*, Archippos’ *Fishes*, **Eupolis’** *Goats*, and it is argued that this element comes from such animal choruses as depicted on these vases. But such choruses do not form a large part of Old Comedy, and we need more than these disguised humans to explain the whole of the genre. While these vases do show a musical performance of men in animal guise, there is no guarantee that these performances must be causally connected with a proto-comedy of the sixth century. They might explain part of the ancestry of Old Comedy, but more is needed.

Certain Corinthian and Athenian vases of the late seventh and early sixth centuries depict groups of performing dancers ("komasts" – see fig. 4.1). Some of these are grotesquely padded, others (later ones) are definitely phallic, and remind one of the grotesque costuming of later comedy, as shown on the south Italian vases of the fourth century. It is argued that these padded dancers from Corinth are the ancestors of Athenian comic actors. Again we have a reasonable and mildly compelling hypothesis, but it is still a jump from Corinthian choral dancers of the early sixth century to Athenian actors of the fifth century. Nor is there any overt connection with the worship of Dionysos, although these komasts are certainly celebrating with wine and with abandon. Moreover, these scenes disappear by the middle of the sixth century, after which we find either ordinary komasts or scenes with satyrs, who do have a definite association both with Dionysos and with drama. But it is still a long step from these exuberant dancers to the organized comedy of the fifth-century festivals. Again they may confirm that some sort of song-and-dance was performed at festivals in the sixth century, which may have led to formal comedy.

The extant comedies provide only hints about the history of their genre, apart from exuberant choruses and characters engaged on interacting humorously with the chorus, each other and the spectators. Attention has been drawn to certain songs in **iambics** (e.g., *Acharnians* 836–59, *Frogs* 416–39, Eupolis F 99.1–22), where the chorus formally pokes fun at certain individuals. This, it is argued, is a relic of a primitive verse-form that marked Athenian festivals. But not all the iambic songs are personally abusive, nor is it likely that Aristophanes and the other comedians of the 420s would slavishly resurrect an old-fashioned form in the midst of their sophisticated comedies. Similarly the **parabasis** with its distinct and formal sub-structure and direct extra-dramatic address to the audience is viewed as a relic of an earlier primitive comedy, where the chorus interacted directly with the audience with little concern for dramatic illusion. But careful studies have shown that the **parabasis**, as used by the poets of the 420s, is a lively and sophisticated device rather than a primitive relic. The **agōn** likewise with its formal and repeated structure could be seen as a traditional feature of comedy – the ancient Greeks loved competition and argument – but it is a long way from a vulgar Punch-and-Judy routine to the **agōn** of *Clouds* or of *Frogs*, where the issues are far from vulgar and the humor elevated and sophisticated. This approach raises also the danger in considering elements of Old Comedy as ritual in origin and thus in practice. At *Frogs* 416–18 the chorus begins a song in iambic dimeter asking, "do you people want us to make fun of Archedemos?," from which one could draw the conclusion that the chorus is consciously re-enacting the "songs from the wagons" at the Dionysia or "the abuse at the bridge" during the Mysteries. But the whole point of ritual is to do the same thing on each occasion, and the goal of comedy is to be original and creative on each occasion. Comedy may have had some origins in public ritual, but Aristophanes and the other poets are not slavishly repeating rites.

The first official performance of comedy is traditionally dated to 486, although Olson (2007) has shown that this date is flexible by a few years in either direction. To the early 480s also belong the first use of ostracism (against aristocrats with alleged Persian sympathies) and the institution of the election of political leaders. Several

critics thus argue that Comedy was originally a weapon against prominent men, especially those with a right-wing bias and that two generations later it was subverted by the right wing as a weapon against the popular democracy. This seems to impute to comedy far too much of a political sense from the start. Granted the evidence before 440 is sparse, but the political element more probably entered comedy in the late 440s along with the influence of the literary iambus; the important figure here is Kratinos. Comedy is very probably the product of animal choruses, padded dancers, prancing satyrs, komasts abusing spectators and one another at festivals. By the early fifth century it had attained a language and style of its own, and in the early 480s was accorded official status in the dramatic competitions at the festival of Dionysos.

Old Comedy (486 – ca. 385)

For tragedy we have complete plays by three (or perhaps more) poets, but for Old Comedy we depend on one author only (Aristophanes, career: 427 – ca. 385). Questions immediately arise. Is Aristophanes typical of Old Comedy as a whole, or is he the brilliant exception, who wrote comedy that outshone the rest of the genre? Can we detect the other sorts of comedy that won prizes and attracted popular approval? Comedy will change immensely in the fourth century. Can we detect the seeds of that change in the fifth century?

The evidence suggests that Aristophanes was not necessarily typical of the genre, that other sorts of comedy were being produced with success, but also that Aristophanes did win the acclaim of posterity and, when compared with what we know of the lost poets, does seem to have written comedy at a superior level. Aristophanes, Kratinos (career: 454–423), and Eupolis (career: 429–411) were considered the canonical triad of Old Comedy, perhaps matching the tragic triad of **Aeschylus**, **Sophokles**, and **Euripides**. These are usually linked together for the political nature of their comedy, their powerful and indecent language, and their indulgence in personal humor. But Aristotle says of Krates, (career: 450–430) that he “was the first to begin to abandon the iambic [abusive] form and to write continuous plots and stories,” while an anonymous commentator says of Pherekrates (career: 440–400) that “he began as an actor and protégé of Krates; he refrained from personal abuse and was especially successful in introducing new themes and inventing plot-lines.” The plots of Krates and Pherekrates may well have been more linear and more like what we understand by a dramatic comedy. Another comic poet, Platon (career: 420s – ca. 380), seems from an analysis of his play-titles and the surviving fragments to have written two distinct sorts of comedy: political and topical comedy like that of Aristophanes, and burlesque of myths. These may well be two chronological stages in his career.

Comedy of the great idea

Again we have to use Aristophanes as the principal source of our evidence, but enough of the other comic poets survives to show that they did write something similar. “Plot”

is not a useful term in dealing with much of Old Comedy; of the eleven extant comedies of Aristophanes, only *Women at the Thesmophoria* has anything like the linear plot-line of a modern comedy. “Farce” or “fantasy” might be more appropriate descriptions of what Aristophanes created. Old Comedy depends not on a complicated plot of intrigue or a subtle interaction between characters, but on the working out of a great and bizarre idea. Imagine a fantastic idea, wind it up and let it run, watch the splendidly “logical” conclusions unfold, and let the whole thing end in a riotous final scene. A typical comedy might run: formulation and presentation of the great idea, debate (*agōn*) to put the idea in action, the comic consequences of the idea, culminating in a resolution, these various elements connected by singing and dancing by the chorus. For Aristophanes the background is always topical and immediate, the present-day city of Athens; this can be detected for several comedies by the other poets as well.

Aristophanes’ “Great Ideas”

Acharnians: Dikaiopolis (“Just City”) makes a personal peace treaty with the Spartan enemy and thus enjoys the results of peace.

Knights: The city of Athens becomes a household, its politicians domestic slaves including the dominant Paphlagon (Kleon), who is overthrown by an even viler figure, a Sausage-Seller.

Clouds: In order to avoid paying his debts Strepsiades (“Twister-son”) enrolls in the “reflectory” of Sokrates.

Wasps: An old man (“Love Kleon”), addicted to jury service, is persuaded by his son (“Hate Kleon”) to become a juror at home and to adopt a brand-new lifestyle.

Peace: An old farmer flies to Olympos on a gigantic dung-beetle to rescue Peace from a cave.

Birds: Two elderly Athenians, sick of the problems of Athens, flee to the birds and found the city of Cloudcuckooland.

Lysistrata: Lysistrata (“She who breaks up armies”) persuades the wives of Greece to engage in a sex-strike to end the war.

Women at the Thesmophoria: The women of Athens discuss putting Euripides on trial for abusing them in his tragedies; Euripides dresses a relative up as a woman and sends him to plead his case.

Frogs: Dionysos, the god of drama, descends to the Underworld, dressed as Herakles. There he judges a contest between the dead tragic poets, Aeschylus and Euripides.

Assembly-Women: Praxagora (“She who acts in public”) has the women of Athens dress up as their husbands, attend the assembly, and vote to turn power over to the women.

Wealth: Wealth (Ploutos) traditionally is blind, but what would happen if Wealth regained his sight?

Lost comedies:

Kratinos' *Wealth-Gods*: The Titans (or Ploutoi, "wealth-gods") have been freed from their imprisonment and have come on a mission to Athens.

Kratinos' *Odysseus and Company*: A parody of the encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops in *Odyssey* 9.

Kratinos' *Wine-Flask*: Kratinos the comic poet has left his true wife, Comedy, for an affair with Methe ("Drunkness"). Comedy and Kratinos' friends (the chorus) try to recall him to his true love.

Kratinos' *Dionysalexandros*: Paris cannot be found to judge the famous beauty-contest of the goddesses, and Dionysos must take his place.

Eupolis' *Demes*: Pyronides ("son of fire") recalls four deceased leaders to put things right at Athens.

Eupolis' *Officers*: Dionysos joins the navy.

Archippos' *Fishes*: Fishes attempt to turn the tables on humans who have been eating them for centuries.

These comedies often feature a strong central character – avoid the word "hero," since classical Greek does not have a word for our understanding of that term – who is responsible for the formulation and execution of the great idea. Even more than in tragedy Old Comedy depicts an individual standing apart from the larger community. More than a little roguery (*ponēria*) goes into their personality, but all are not cut from the same cloth. Some are old men (Dikaiopolis, Strepsiades, Trygaios, Peisetairos, Chremylos); two are mature women (Lysistrata, Praxagora), and in *Frogs* the main character is the gender-challenged god Dionysos. In *Wasps* we have a pair of principal characters, cleverly juxtaposed. The great idea, jury service at home, is devised by the younger man, Bdelykleon, for the benefit of his elderly father, Philokleon, who shares much of the characteristics of the usual main character. Comic protagonists stand up as individuals against a situation that they find intolerable, find a brilliant and fantastic solution, and keep the comedy bubbling to the end of the drama. The characters are not totally sympathetic. Dionysos plays the role of the comic buffoon in *Frogs*, Strepsiades in *Clouds* can be tiresome in the teaching-scenes with Sokrates, and more than one critic has seen in Peisetairos (*Birds*) a comic portrait of a would-be **tyrant**.

The chorus in Old Comedy

Comedy originated with some sort of group performance which involved both song and dance. Like tragedy and satyr-drama the non-lyric meter most commonly used is the iambic trimeter, which Aristotle insisted was the closest meter to normal speech, but also found are the **trochaic** tetrameter (a meter of excited movement); the iambic tetrameter, rather more elevated than the corresponding trimeter; and the **anapestic** tetrameter, a noble meter, to which the ancients gave the name "aristophanean." Comedy likewise has both **episodes**, scenes primarily involving the actors (with more

participation, however, by the chorus than in tragedy), and its lyric sections, both dialogue in song between actor and chorus and purely choral songs and recitations. When monodies occur in comedy, they are usually parodies of tragedy or deliberately pitched in a comically high style with frequent descents into bathos.

The chorus was larger than in tragedy, twenty-four as opposed to twelve or fifteen in the earlier genre, and had a greater participation in the action of the play. In some Aristophanic comedies the chorus provides the primary opposition to the main character and the great idea – as in *Acharnians*, *Wasps*, *Birds*, *Women at the Thesmophoria* – and on other occasions supports that great idea (as in *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Peace*, *Assembly-Women*, and *Wealth*). In *Lysistrata* we get a pair of opposing half-choruses (old men and women), while in *Frogs* the chorus is largely neutral, appropriately so since they provide an audience for the debate between the tragic poets.

In tragedy choruses are almost always human – the Furies in *Eumenides* and the Daughters of Ocean in *Prometheus* are obvious exception – and in satyr-drama invariably made up of satyrs, but Old Comedy has considerably more freedom. One subset of comic choruses is that in animal form, which some have seen as indicative of the origins of comedy. But these choruses are not that numerous, perhaps about 20 percent of the total number of comedies where we can identify the chorus. Other comic choruses are formed of entities of concepts, such as *Clouds*, Eupolis' *Cities* and *Demes*, Kratinos' *Seasons* – here the comic poet must blend the concept with a human personality – while still others are composed of figures from myth, such as in Kratinos' *Men of Seriphos*, *Wealth-Gods*, and *Dionysalexandros* (satyrs). But the vast majority of the choruses of Old Comedy are made up of humans of all sorts and conditions: farmers, old men and women, members of various communities (demes, cities) and classes (knights) and occupations (officers). Of the sixty or so comedies of the “Big Three” (Aristophanes, Kratinos, Eupolis), where we can ascertain the chorus' identity, more than half have human choruses, including *Wasps*, since the old men there are only metaphorically wasps.

The language of comedy

In his *Poetics* Aristotle distinguishes tragedy from comedy in that the latter concerns itself with “inferior people” (1448a17) and depicts what is ridiculous (*geloion*, 1449a33). Thus the language of comedy will assist in creating what is ridiculous and will descend to a cruder and more colloquial level than tragedy and satyr-drama. Comedy shares much in its language with the earlier iambic poets (most notably Archilochos [career: 680–640] and Hipponax [career: 550–520]), especially in its attacks on personal targets, striking creations of words, and colloquial and obscene vocabulary. The bizarre and the incongruous naturally provoke a humorous reaction, and the poets of Old Comedy were fond of constructing marvelous verbal combinations, such as those describing the devotees of the new learning at *Clouds* 332–3:

*Thouriomanteis, iatrotechnās, sphragidonychargokomētās,
kykliōn te chorōn asmatokamptās, andras meteōrophenekas.*

Prophets from Thuri, medical-experts, long-haired layabouts with onyx signet-rings, song-twisters for the dithyrambic chorus, meteorological quacks.

Names were especially open to comic innovation, as at *Acharnians* 603: Teisamenophainippoi (“Teisamenos + Phainippos”), Panourghipparchidai (“nasty sons of Hipparchos”), or at Eupolis F 424: Amphiptolemopedesistratos (“Double-battle-leap-istratos”).

At one pole Old Comedy can be highly literate and sophisticated, requiring an intellectual response from its watchers, and at the other can wallow in the gutter of the ancient equivalent of four-letter words and explicit sexual allusions. Here comedy differs sharply from satyr-drama, in that the latter preserves the language and level of tragedy, while Old Comedy at its crudest is blunt. In tragedy sexual intercourse is described by innuendos and circumlocutions:

one of my friends says that she lay with Apollo. (*Ion* 338)

Zeus is inflamed by the arrow of desire and wishes to join in love with you. (*Prometheus* 649–51)

But comedy is far more direct and would use the basic word *binein* (“fuck”):

Praxagora: Do I smell of perfume?

Blepyros: What? A woman can’t get fucked without perfume? (*Assembly-Women* 524–5)

Chorus: What are we suffering from? Don’t keep it from me.

Lysistrata: Fuck-itis, to put it as succinctly as possible. (*Lysistrata* 714–15)

Another source of humor created by language lies in comedy’s fondness for characters speaking in something other than Attic Greek. One can easily identify modern comic stereotypes, in which characters speak in deliberately over-stated Scots or Italian or German or the English of the Indian sub-continent. The purpose does not have to be hostile; in fact the caricature is just as often wrapped in a smile as a sneer. There is always good humor to be had from a group of “us” watching one of “them” and feeling good about our identity by laughing at someone different. In Old Comedy we get barbarians speaking either virtual gibberish or barely passable Greek (the Persian ambassador in *Acharnians* or the Scythian policeman at the end of *Women at the Thesmophoria*), and comedies with titles such as *Thracian Women* (Kratinos) and *Lydians* (Mages) suggest that foreign characters appeared in these plays also. We would very much like to know to what extent the chorus in Aristophanes’ controversial *Babylonians* (426-D) acted and talked like Babylonians. Eupolis’ *Marikas* is known to have had a Persian theme and perhaps its title character (the thinly disguised demagogue, Hyperbolos) spoke with something of a Persian accent.

Greeks from other states, and thus speaking something other than Attic Greek, appear also in the comedies of Aristophanes. A Megarian appears in *Acharnians*, followed by a Boiotian, both speaking in the (comic) dialect appropriate to them. More considerable is the role of the Spartans in *Lysistrata*, first Lampito in the prologue,

later an envoy, and finally a chorus who sing local Spartan songs along with their Athenian hosts. As the great rival, Spartans (and their Doric dialect) would be well known to Athenians, occupying the role that German did to British and American audiences in the 1940s. Comedy does not make fun of non-Attic Greeks by their dialect, which is usually well presented by the comic poets. The humor lies elsewhere in their difference from Athenians and their customs, in their poor circumstances because of the war, and in their treatment by more clever Athenians.

The iambic trimeter in Old Comedy is used with considerably more freedom than in tragedy. Metrical resolutions, which are tightly controlled in the tragic poets, occur more often and with greater abandon. Some comic lines pile on the short syllables to the point where the metrical scheme is all but lost. When the line switches speakers, awkward breaks in the meter can be observed. But when comedy parodies tragedy, the metrical form reverts to the much more restricted style of tragedy.

With the comedy of **Menander** (325–290) the language of comedy becomes less “classical” and more in the style of what we call *koinē* (“common”) Greek, less rigorous in its forms, vocabulary, and syntax. This may in part account for Menander’s lack of survival in later antiquity, when authors writing the pure or classical Attic were diligently sought as models. Aristophanes was celebrated for the purity of his language, language that accorded well with the canons of classical taste. Quintilian (10.1.65) comments that “Old Comedy is almost the only form to retain that pure grace of Attic language.” An anonymous writer contrasts the clarity of New Comedy with the “power and grandeur” of the Old, while Phrynichos (a grammarian of the third century AD) ranks Aristophanes with **Plato** and Demosthenes as the pillars of classical Attic Greek. Ancient writers may have shrunk from the personal humor and political themes, but they were also quick to see that Old Comedy possessed *charis* (“grace”) and charm in its speech. It should be noted, however, that Aristophanes himself displays a comic style in transition, as his latest extant comedy (*Wealth*, – 388) shows distinct signs of a more “demotic” form of Greek. In the fourth century more than the themes and characters of comedy changed.

The costume of Old Comedy

Aristotle stresses that comedy represents what was “ridiculous” or “laughable” (*geloion*, from *gelān*, “to laugh”). Its visual aspect reflects this emphasis on the ridiculous. Whereas tragedy concerns itself with what is serious and more elevated than “normal” life, comedy lowers its level to what the spectators will laugh at. We do not have many visual representations of tragic performances, but two vases illustrate neatly the difference in costume and aspect between the dramatic genres. First the Pronomos Vase (ca. 400) shows the cast preparing for the performance of a satyr-drama (see fig. 3.1), on which we see two actors in splendid high costume. Even though this is satyr-drama, it does belong to the same realm as tragedy and we may fairly conclude that tragedy did dress its actors in splendid fashion. This gives all the more force to Aristophanes’ jokes about Euripides’ characters dressed in rags or the comments of “Aeschylus” at *Frogs* 1060–1:



Figure 4.2 *The Chorēgoi Vase, showing a scene from an unknown Old Comedy (Aristophanes' Pre-contest?), on an Apulian bell-krater, early fourth century. Reproduced courtesy of the Museo Nazionale, Naples.*

Similarly it is reasonable for demigods to use grander words and to dress far more elegantly than us.

The other vase is the *Chorēgoi Vase* (fig. 4.2), which shows a character from tragedy (Aigisthos) in company with and in pointed contrast to a set of characters from comedy.

Characters in Old Comedy were grotesquely presented in large masks with distorted features, large mouths and eyes, unlike the realistic features of the tragic mask. Bodies were padded, especially in the shoulders, giving a stooped appearance, in the belly, and in the buttocks. Male characters wore a body suit and dangling phallos, unlike the small erections in the briefs worn by satyrs. Aristophanes makes a wry comment at *Clouds* 537–9 about the delicacy of his new comedy:

Just look at how decent she is. First of all she doesn't come on stage wearing a stitched <phallos> of red leather, thick from the tip on down, to make the little boys laugh.

An erect phallos should suggest a sexual or fertility significance and perhaps say something about the origins of comedy as fertility ritual, but the red dangling phallos is intentionally ridiculous (*geloion*) and implies that it was worn to be funny and the object of laughter. In one hilarious scene from *Women at the Thesmophoria* (463–8) a female impersonator is unmasked and proved definitely to be male by the discovery of his phallos, which moves back and forth as his inquisitors press on him from front and rear:

Kleisthenes: Stand up straight. Why are you pushing your prick down?

Woman: It's popped out here. And what a nice colour!

Kleisthenes: Where is it?

Woman: It's gone back to the front again.

Kleisthenes: No it's not.

Woman: It's back here again.

Kleisthenes: You've got an isthmus here, man! You're shuttling your prick back and forth more often than the Corinthians.

The business about the color and the movement suggests that Aristophanes has outfitted Euripides' kinsman with a particularly red-colored and versatile appendage. Characters in comedy were meant to be ridiculous and laughed at.

The structure of Old Comedy

As far as we can gather from the eleven comedies of Aristophanes and the fragments of the other comic poets, Old Comedy was a loosely structured thing, lacking the linear plot of the later comedy of errors and intrigue. Krates and Pherekrates, however, are said to have written plays with coherent plots. Aristophanes' comedies display a series of recurring and formally constructed sub-units that can be found also in the fragments of the other poets. It is a fair conclusion that the comedies of Aristophanes' rivals will not have been unlike his own, although they may have used these structural features in different ways. Even Aristophanes himself varies his material from play to play. Not every comedy has a formal contest (*agōn*); in three plays an exposition by the main character replaces the formal debate. Both the actual form and the subject of the *parabasis* vary within the comedies of Aristophanes. The other comic poets seem to have been much freer in their use of meter in the *parabasis* proper.

Prologue: Unlike tragedy, comedy has to create its own plots and characters, and also must warm up the audience to ensure that they respond well to the unfolding comedy. Prologues in comedy usually run from 200 to 300 lines and may consist of several scenes, while tragic prologues tend to be briefer and use only one or two scenes. The meter is usually the "prosaic" iambic trimeter, although actors can break into song. In the first 315 lines of *Frogs* we have a comic dialogue between Xanthias and Dionysos (1–34), a door-scene with Herakles (35–163), a brief encounter with a corpse (164–80), a scene involving Charon the ferryman of the dead (180–208), Dionysos rowing across the lake and engaging in a singing contest with a group of unseen frogs (209–67), and a final exchange between Xanthias and Dionysos

(268–315). Comedy depends upon constant reaction from the spectators and the pace and humor of the play must not be allowed to flag. The actors often break the dramatic illusion and address the spectators directly.

Parodos: As in tragedy, this is the entry of the chorus, whose identity has been revealed in the prologue so that the spectators will know whom to expect (*Frogs* 154–8):

Herakles: Then a breath of flutes will envelop you and you will behold a very beautiful light, like that of the sun up here, myrtle-groves, and happy bands of men and women, and much clapping of hands.

Dionysos: Who are they?

Herakles: These are the initiated.

The chorus may enter to support the main character (as in *Knights*, *Peace*, *Assembly-Women*, *Wealth*), or to oppose him (as in *Acharnians*, *Wasps*, *Birds*), or just to observe (*Frogs*). *Lysistrata* has two opposing half-courses; the old women have entered during the prologue, while the formal entry belongs to the old men. The *parodos* must have been one of the most spectacular parts of the comedy. The chorus can rush violently on stage, prepared to do battle (*Acharnians*, *Knights*), while in *Wasps* and *Lysistrata* the old men can barely shuffle onto the scene. In *Clouds* Aristophanes brings the spectators into the game, since everyone except the main character can see the chorus of clouds as they drift into the *orchēstra* – “there they are, over by the *eisodos*” (326). The *parodos*, like the prologue, can consist of a sequence of scenes, especially in *Frogs*. The chorus will either sing in lyric meter or employ a grander meter, such as the trochaic tetrameter (used for vigorous rushes on stage) or the anapestic tetrameter (with its solemn and declaratory overtones). When the actors intervene in the *parodos*, they continue to use the iambic trimeter.

Agōn: Drama thrives on overt competition and conflict, witness the great popularity of the courtroom drama in modern entertainment. Often the action in comedy will turn on the result of a formal debate (*agōn*) between two characters. In its purest form the *agōn* develops in a symmetrical pattern with formal and repeated sub-units, as formal as an aria in opera or a lyric number in a Broadway or West End musical. Again using *Frogs* as a model we have:

The Agōn in *Frogs*

Song by the chorus: 895–904.

Introduction of speaker 1 (Euripides): 904–5.

Speaker 1: 907–70.

Pnigos (“choking-song”): 971–91.

Song by the chorus: 992–1003.

Introduction of speaker 2 (Aeschylus): 1004–5.

Speaker 2: 1006–76.

Pnigos (“choking-song”): 1077–98.

Final song by the chorus: 1099–1119.

The two songs of the chorus correspond closely in length and meter, while the speeches of the combatants are in an elevated meter, usually the anapestic tetrameter or the iambic tetrameter. The former is the more solemn, and it is worth noting that in the *agōn* of both *Clouds* and *Frogs* the more traditional and dignified speaker (Right, “Aeschylus”) uses anapests, while the more avant-garde and modern opponent (Wrong, “Euripides”) employs iambics. The speeches may frequently be interrupted by the antagonist, by a third character, and by the chorus, all using the same meter as the main speaker. Each formal speech can end in a *pnigos*, where the tetrameter is cut in half to become dimeter and the whole thing sung in one breath, hence “choking-song.”

Some comedies have two formal *agōns* (*Knights*, *Clouds*). In *Knights* the first *agōn* is a warm-up to the more decisive second, while in *Clouds* the second is but an echo of the first. In *Frogs* the order of events is reversed, with the episodes coming in the first half of the comedy and the *agōn* between the dead poets reserved for the second half. In a “normal” comedy the episodes would show the working out of the great idea, whose fate has been decided earlier in the *agōn*. In *Birds* and *Assembly-Women* the formal structure is retained, but both halves are spoken by the protagonist who outlines his or her great idea to the chorus. This is not an *agōn*, but an exposition. Three plays (*Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*) lack a formally structured *agōn*; each does, however, have an important and dramatic speech by the main character. Usually the second speaker wins the debate, but in *Wealth* the second speaker (Poverty) seems to have the better of the argument but loses, leading many scholars to impute an ironic tone to the rest of the comedy: universal wealth is not in the long run good for humanity. The badly mutilated commentary (F 192) to Eupolis’ *Marikas* (421-L) strongly hints at two *agōns* between the demagogue Hyperbolos, portrayed as “Marikas,” and an unknown opponent.

Challenges and competitions in comedy are by no means restricted to the formal *agōn*, although this feature is worked formally into so many of the extant plays. At the end of *Acharnians* Dikaiopolis returns triumphant from a drinking-contest; at the end of *Wasps* Philokleon challenges Karkinos and his sons (performers in tragedy) to a dancing contest. Dionysos defeats the chorus of frogs in some sort of bizarre musical contest; later in the same comedy he and his slave Xanthias will be subjected to trial by beating in order to determine which is the real god.

Parabases: Perhaps the most curious and formal feature of Old Comedy, the *parabasis* comes at a natural break in the action with the actors off stage. Here the chorus will suspend the dramatic illusion and directly address the spectators. In the extant comedies it can come as early as line 500 (*Clouds*) and as late as line 1000 (*Wasps*). A *parabasis* breaks down into certain formal and repeated sub-sections. Not every *parabasis* possesses all these features, but in its full form, found in *Wasps*, *Knights*, and *Birds*, it looks as follows:

The Main *Parabasis* in *Birds*

[a] Song by the chorus: *Birds* 676–84.

[b] *Parabasis* proper: *Birds* 685–722.

- [c] *Pnigos* ("choking-song"): *Birds* 723–36.
- [d] Lyric song ("ode"): *Birds* 737–52.
- [e] Epirrhema ("declaration"): *Birds* 753–68.
- [f] Lyric song ("antode"): *Birds* 769–84.
- [g] Antepirrhema ("counter-declaration"): *Birds* 785–800.

The *parabasis* proper is chanted in a fifteen-syllable meter, usually the anapestic tetrameter catalectic; on more than one occasion the chorus announce that they are about singing their "anapests" (*Acharnians* 627, *Birds* 684). In *Clouds*, however, Aristophanes "borrows" the eupolidean meter, named for his rival Eupolis whom he explicitly accuses of plagiarism at *Clouds* 551–8 and thus reinforces his point about the originality of his comedy and the failings of his rivals. Fragments of the other comic poets suggest that a variety of fifteen-syllable meters could be used in this section. The *pnigos* employs the anapestic meter of the *parabasis* proper, but in dimeter rather than tetrameter. As the eupolidean is a more complicated metrical form and does not divide neatly in half, there is no *pnigos* in *Clouds*.

In Aristophanes' four comedies of the 420s, the chorus in the *parabasis* proper speak directly for the comic poet, often employing the first-person singular (as at *Acharnians* 659–64, *Clouds* 518–62, *Peace* 754, 765), where "I" and "me" are not the chorus but Aristophanes himself. In these comedies the poet speaks directly to the spectators through his chorus, discoursing about the superiority of his own comedy, the inferiority of his rivals, and the inability of the spectators and judges to distinguish true comic quality. In *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Frogs* the chorus stays in character throughout and says nothing on the comic poet's behalf.

The last four sub-divisions (song + epirrhema, song + antepirrhema) form a single integrated unit, often given the name of "epirrhematic syzygy." The two halves will correspond exactly in both the number of lines and the meter. The songs are sung in lyric meters, but unlike tragedy they remain within the Attic dialect; the epirrhema/antepirrhema are usually in trochaic tetrameter catalectic or on occasion the paeonic tetrameter. Epirrhemata in trochaics invariably consist of units of lines of multiples of four.

Not all comedies have a *parabasis* with such a complete format. In *Acharnians* the opening song [a] is reduced to two anapests at the start of the *parabasis* proper. In *Peace* we get only [b] + [c] and the ode/antode [d] + [f]. In *Lysistrata* we have two opposing half-choruses, who sing combative syzygies, with no *parabasis* proper or *pnigos*. *Women at the Thesmophoria* has a stripped down *parabasis*, consisting only of [b] + [c] and one epirrhema [e]. The formal *parabasis* of *Frogs* (674–737) consists solely of the epirrhematic syzygy, since the anapests of the *parabasis* proper are found much earlier at lines 354–71. In *Assembly-Women* and *Wealth* there is no formal *parabasis* at all. Many comedies have a second *parabasis* (or even a third, as in *Acharnians*), which consists only of the epirrhematic syzygy. In these the chorus usually remains within its dramatic character, although at *Wasps* 1284–91 Aristophanes himself tells of his latest encounter with Kleon and boasts of his revenge in this particular comedy.

The chorus can do a number of things in a *parabasis*: speak for the poet and his comedy in the *parabasis* proper and *pnigos*, explain the appropriateness of their dramatic role and costume, sing hymns to the gods, indulge in sustained personal invective (usually in the ode and antode), give advice to the citizens, and appeal to the judges within its dramatic persona, as at *Birds* 1102–17: why it is advantageous to have a grateful chorus of birds and dangerous if they are disappointed.

It is sometimes assumed that the *parabasis* with its formal and repeated features was a relic of a traditional element in the development of comedy, that it was something expected by the audience. But recent studies have shown that, far from being a venerable appendage to the comic action, the *parabasis* is very skillfully integrated into the themes of the comedy, both in terms of the subject-matter of the play and the repeated patterns of imagery. According to Dikaiarchos, the *parabasis* of *Frogs* was the reason for that comedy's unprecedented honor of a second formal performance.

Episodes: These are the scenes dominated by the actors, although the chorus does participate and both chorus and actors may shift briefly into lyric meters from the usual iambic trimeter. In a typical comedy a series of episodes follows the adoption of the great idea and demonstrate the logical working-out of its consequences, the exception here being *Frogs*. Perhaps the single best episode in extant Aristophanes is the "trial of the dogs" at *Wasps* 891–1008, which follows from the son's victory in the *agôn* and his insistence that his father can still act as a juror, but at home. In *Birds*, *Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Assembly-Women*, and *Wealth* we see series of "intruders" arrive to share in the benefits of the great idea. Most will be driven off with suitably comic violence. In Eupolis' lost comedy, *Demes* we may infer that each of the four leaders raised from the dead had an episode in which he tackled an appropriate denizen of modern Athens. A south Italian vase (ca. 350) shows a scene from this comedy in which the main character, Pyronides, encounters Phrynīs, a contemporary avant-garde musician. With Aristophanes we observe how he varies these scenes with great finesse and imagination. In *Birds* we have three distinct sets of intruder-scenes, which might stretch this longest of extant comedies, but they succeed admirably in maintaining the interest and response of the spectators.

Songs (*kommata*): The episodes are separated by choral interludes, in which the chorus may respond to the unfolding action, sing songs of personal abuse, or engage in lyric dialogue with an actor. Some of these interludes are in fact second or third *parabases*. One sequence deserves a mention: the songs in trochaics at *Birds* 1470–92, 1553–64, 1694–1705, where the birds, remaining within their dramatic character, reflect on certain strange sights which turn out to be certain notorious denizens of contemporary Athens, most notably the Kleonymos tree (1470–81), which in the winter does not shed leaves, but rather shields.

Exodos: Aristophanes' comedies end in a number of ways: reconciliation of the combatants (*Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*), a marriage of a man and a deity (*Peace*, *Birds*), a great party and celebration (*Acharnians*, *Assembly-Women*), a sense of victory and rejoicing (*Knights*, *Frogs*). Two finales deserve specific mention: that of *Wasps* where the old man dances all contenders into oblivion, including the real figures of Karkinos and sons. Here Aristophanes claims to be the first to send a chorus off dancing. In *Clouds* the old man undergoes a complete change of mind and the

entire action of the comedy is reversed with the burning down of Sokrates' "reflectory."

The theme of the Golden Age

Old Comedy lasted for around a hundred years and we know of over fifty different poets for that period. Clearly not every comic poet will have written the same sort of play, any more that all situation-comedies shown on television between 1950 and 2000 will have been cut from the same cloth. Comedies vary in their subject, theme, approach, humor, and what the comedians can get away with. Chronology plays a major role, since today we look back at the sit-coms of the 1950s and 1960s with a mixture of nostalgic affection and supercilious superiority. What amused the spectators in the time of Magnes (470s) may have seemed quite passé by the time of the 420s; in fact if we can trust what Aristophanes says at *Knights* 507–50 and *Frogs* 1099–1118, comedy had become much more "sophisticated" by the late fifth century. Aristophanes has the advantage of having survived and having become the exemplar for all subsequent critics, but he seems to have preferred a comedy of an intensely topical and personal nature and to have avoided certain other sorts, e.g. the mythological burlesque or the theme of the Golden Age. When he did write burlesque, he preferred to write parodies of tragedies, usually those of Euripides.

The theme of the Golden Age, the ideal life in the ideal place, goes back to the islands of the Blest in Homer and Hesiod where the heroes of myth live (*Odyssey* 4.561–69, *Works and Days* 156–73), or to the first of Hesiod's ages of man (*Works and Days* 109–20). Comedy found much in the traditional account of the de-evolution of humanity that it could exploit. There is always good entertainment to be had by setting modern reality against an ideal utopia.

Utopias can be located in the past (paradise lost), in the future (paradise attained), or somewhere "out there" (paradise found). All three types can be found in Old Comedy. In Kratinos' *Wealth-Gods* the utopia is plainly in the past: when Kronos ruled, men played dice with bread-loaves, and cakes fell out of the trees (F 176). In Telekleides' *Amphiktyons* (F 1) an unknown speaker outlines the blessings of another utopia past, where "all necessities came automatically," when "men were fat and like giants." In Krates' *Beasts* two speakers seem to be debating (F 16–17) the details of a future utopia. In this ideal age (or place) meals, including tables and food, will prepare themselves automatically. Pherekrates' *Miners* (F 113–14) intriguingly locates utopia, not "out there," but "down there," in the underworld, expressed again in terms of the gastronomic delights to be found there, while his *Persians* (F 137–9) presents an ideal existence either "out there" (presumably in Persia) or in the future – note the future tenses at F 137.5,6,10, although these may be future in the sense of "when you get there."

Aristophanes did not write entire comedies on this sort of theme, although a "great idea" motivates many of his comedies, whose realization will create or restore a happier environment. The end of *Knights* returns Demos ("the People") to better days, the wish of the son in *Wasps* is to make his father happy and comfortable, while *Birds*

does to some degree create a utopia “out there,” i.e., among the birds, and the two last plays (*Assembly-Women*, *Wealth*) are certainly utopias to be created in the future. But what is missing in Aristophanes is the *automatos bios* (“the automatic life”), the rivers of food and drink and compliant food and furniture. Also Aristophanes’ comedies create not a distant ideal, but a remade Athens. Aristophanic comedy is certainly full of the pleasures of food and drink, but he does not indulge in this aspect of life in the Golden Age.

Artistic parody

Humor is a natural human reaction to what others take (too) seriously. In Lucian’s *Twice Accused* (33) Dialogue complains of his treatment by Lucian, who has created a comic hybrid including “Eupolis and Aristophanes, men who are very skilled at mocking what is serious.” The ancients attributed to Homer not only the deeply serious epics (*Iliad*, *Odyssey*), but also the burlesque poem, *Margites*, and the delightful *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*. Tragedy was accompanied at an early date by satyr-drama, *tragōidia paizousa* (“tragedy kidding around”), which made dramatic fun of the serious themes of tragedy and epic. Even in the *Odyssey* and the *Homeric Hymns* a serious theme can be tempered by moments of humor. Athenians could at the same festival weep over the fortunes of tragic heroes and laugh at the juxtaposition of mythical themes with modern reality, the high level tempered by the language of everyday life.

Aristophanes avoided the mythological burlesque, preferring to parody specific tragedies, mainly those of Euripides, and the high style of the lyric poets, rather than the myths they sang of. Even in *Wealth*, when he parodies the story of the Cyclops (290–322), his model is a specific one, the *Cyclops* of Philoxenos. As Eupolis also did not write parodies of myth, critics have tended to downplay their appearance in Old Comedy and regard the mythological burlesque as a feature of Middle Comedy, forgetting that parodies of myth can be found in comedy of the 430s. The political-topical comedy that became the vogue of the 420s and 410s, perhaps coupled with a decrease in the number of productions, appears to have so dominated the genre for a generation, that it is not until the early fourth century that this earlier sort of comedy re-emerges.

As many as one-third of the comedies of Kratinos (career: 454–423) seem to have been burlesques of myth: *Dionysalexandros* (Dionysos replaces Paris for the famous judgment), *Runaways* (F 53, spoken by Theseus, parodied his wrestling-bout with Kerkyon), *Nemesis* (the birth of Helen), *Odysseus and Company* (Odysseus and the Cyclops), *Wealth-Gods* (the return of the Titans), *Men of Seriphos* (the adventures of Perseus), *Chirons* (F 253 shows that these were the chorus). Some engage with a particular text, e.g., *Odysseus and Company* with *Odyssey* 9, *Wealth-Gods* in part with the Prometheus-plays, but the one we know best, *Dionysalexandros*, does not seem to be playing against any one version of the Judgment of Paris. Hermippos (career: ca. 435–410s) is similarly known to have written parodies of myth. At least five titles (*Agamemnon*, *Europe*, *Kerkopes*, *Fates*, *Birth of Athene*) belong to this sort of comedy, the last, *Birth of Athene*, being the earliest instance of a sub-genre, the birth of a deity,

which would become more common in the early fourth century, the heyday of the mythological burlesque. The humorous story of a god's birth can be found also in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* and in the satyr-drama. Of the other pre-Aristophanic comedians, Kallias wrote *Cyclopes*, Myrtilos a *Titan-Pans*, and **Phrynichos** an early play which featured a burlesque of the Andromeda-myth with a drunken old woman replacing the damsel in distress.

Three gods in particular lent themselves to comic treatment: Herakles, the familiar glutton of satyr-drama and comedy; Hermes, a god who crosses boundaries and runs errands for Zeus, is especially good for comedy – we see him in *Peace*, *Wealth*, and at F 61 of Phrynichos, as well as in the amusing *Homeric Hymn* and Sophokles' satyric *Trackers*; and, of course, Dionysos, whose misadventures are a familiar and favored theme. Kratinos' comedy shows that myth can overlap with politics, although it is debatable whether plays such as *Nemesis* and *Dionysalexandros* were fully political and topical comedies.

Comedy of ideas

Old Comedy is a brilliant mixture of low-level humor (bodily functions, slap-stick, beating a joke to death) and a much more sophisticated comedy of ideas, which requires the spectators to appreciate an elaborate and sustained parody of Euripidean tragedy, the poems of Homer and Pindar, and the teachings of Sokrates and the sophists. It will not do to say that the latter appealed only to a minority audience of "intelligentsia," since in a competitive genre a comedian is unlikely to alienate or mystify the bulk of his spectators. We should rather suppose that the Athenian audience as a whole could and did appreciate this sort of sophisticated humor, that Aristophanes' claims at *Frogs* 1109–18 of the cultural abilities of Athenian spectators are not exaggerated:

Now if you both fear that the spectators are in the grip of stupidity, that they would not appreciate it when you say something clever, don't be afraid on that account. Things aren't like that any more. They're seasoned campaigners; each one has his own book and knows what is clever.

Perhaps Aristophanes was unusual in this regard, perhaps one of the features that marked his comedy out was this sort of elevated comedy that appealed to more than the groundlings of fifth-century Athens. He certainly claimed this for himself. Obviously since all we have are fragments of other poets, we cannot immediately assess how typical Aristophanes may have been, but we can say something about how other comic poets used parody or the comedy of ideas.

A passage from Kratinos takes us to the realm of philosophy, the statement of Σ *Clouds* 95, that the analogy of the sky as a giant chafing-dish (*Clouds* 95–7):

In there dwell men who make a compelling argument that the sky is a giant chafing-dish which surrounds us, and that we are the coals

had already been used by Kratinos in his *All-Seers* (F 167). That this arresting analogy, which depends on a pun on “men” (*andres*) and “coals” (*anthrakes*), should find its way into popular comedy is no more surprising than Anaxagoras’ ideas about parenthood appearing in the mouth of Apollo at *Eumenides* 657–61. The so-called “Enlightenment” of the fifth century was not restricted to the intellectuals but could become the stuff of popular culture. We are pre-occupied with Sokrates and the caricature of him in *Clouds*, but Aristophanes was not breaking new ground in 423 by making fun of him. Telekleides F 41, two iambic tetrameters from an unknown play, connects Sokrates and Euripides, the former laying the “kindling” for the latter’s play. Since Telekleides belongs before the début of Aristophanes, comic jokes at both Euripides and Sokrates were not new with Aristophanes.

The 420s saw a spate of comedies with philosophers and ideas as major or minor themes. Aristophanes’ first comedy, *Banqueters* (427), featured an old man with two very different sons (“the good son and the asshole”). It does not require much of an effort to see a theme of comparative education and behavior here. Eupolis’ comedy, *Goats* (424-D?), had a teacher called Prodamos teaching an old farmer to dance and adopting the supercilious manner of the intellectual. Ameipsias’ *Konnos*, named after a famous musician and produced with *Clouds* at 423-D, possessed a chorus of “thinkers”; F 9 shows that Sokrates was a character in that play also. Eupolis’ *Spongers* (421-D) featured the sophist Protagoras as a character, perhaps also Sokrates. Σ *Clouds* 96 in fact asserts that Eupolis attacked Sokrates more vehemently than Aristophanes “in the whole of *Clouds*.” Comedy fastened not only on the distinctive physical traits of Sokrates and other philosophers and on their *adoleschia* (“babbling”) – more than anything else they “talk nonsense” – but also on what they taught: “making the inferior argument appear superior” (*Clouds* 112–15), the finer points of physics (*Clouds* 143–216, Kratinos F 161, Eupolis F 157), grammar and *mousikē* generally.

Domestic comedy

Old Comedy is essentially comedy of the *polis* (“city”), while the comedy of Menander is comedy of the *oikos* (“home”). For Aristophanes the contemporary city, its denizens and issues are never far away, while in New Comedy we may be conscious of an urban setting, but it is rarely more than a backdrop. Old Comedy does have its domestic settings. In *Knights* the city has become the household of Demos (“the People”), in *Wasps* the issue is preventing Philokleon from leaving his house for the jury-courts, in *Lysistrata* the women have turned the Acropolis into their own household and thus inextricably merged house and city. In *Wealth* the house of Chremylos may be the setting, but the issue of Wealth regaining his sight is a larger one for all of Greece. When we get to Menander, the house is everything. Relationships are all-important, be they father–son, boy–girl, brother–sister, and the plots on which these depend deal with the adventures within relationships. There is very little of this in Aristophanes, at least in the eleven plays that we possess. The *Life of Aristophanes* records that in his late play, *Kokalos*, “he brought on stage seductions and recognitions, in which Menander followed him.” But in his high period, there is not much that will

prefigure Menander, apart from some cheeky and cunning slaves and a young couple in *Assembly-Women*.

In several of the lost plays also there are several places where we can detect a house and its domestic life. Kratinos' *Wine-Flask* featured the poet's wife and a chorus of friends; thus the setting must have been Kratinos' house to which the drunken poet at one point returns – compare the closing scene of *Wasps* (produced eight months later). Eupolis' *Spongers* was set at the house of Kallias, where a great party is being planned. The main characters may be real, but the humor was probably more personal than political. Aristophanes seems more likely to present a political setting, while Eupolis and Kratinos, not to mention Pherekrates, could write plays with a more domestic background.

Much of domestic comedy has to do with female roles in comedy. Henderson and others have argued that *Lysistrata* (411) marks a watershed in the depiction of women: "there are no earlier examples of a female protagonist like Lysistrata . . . female speaking parts in earlier plays are personifications . . . figures from mythology . . . or relatives of prominent men" (Henderson 1987: xxviii). Henderson's thesis is somewhat borne out by looking at comedies that we can date before 411. There is no obvious ancestor for *Lysistrata*; we do find women of myth in Kratinos' *Dionysalexandros* (Helen) and *Nemesis* (Leda), Phrynichos' old woman, perhaps Atalante in Kallias' *Atalantai*, as well as personifications (Kratinos *Wine-Flask* with Comedy, Pherekrates' *Tyranny*), and women connected with famous people, Hyperbolos' mother in *Marikas* and *Bread-Sellers* by Hermippos. As far as female characters in Eupolis and Aristophanes are concerned, Henderson's thesis certainly holds. But one wonders about his dismissal of certain female characters as "mythological." We assume that he means that these are not "real-life" women in domestic settings, but surely there was good comedy to be had from the portrayals of Helen and Leda by Kratinos, who must have had more than incidental roles. Euripides was producing his "Potiphar's Wife" plays by the 430s, and comedy could well have picked up on this theme of "bad" women in a domestic situation. Surely the comic depiction of women as wine-loving, sex-crazed gossips did not begin with Aristophanes' plays of 411. *Wine-Flask* had a domestic setting involving Comedy, the wife of Kratinos, and his mistress, Drunkenness, both of whom must have had substantial roles. Early plays with female choruses, such as Kratinos' *Thracian Women* (430s) and Hermippos' *Bread-Sellers* (410s), would also have allowed for a comic depiction of women.

Certain comedies of Pherekrates suggest a role for women apart from the criteria laid down by Henderson. Several fragments of his *Korianno* (F 73–82) reveal a scene of entertainment, including drinking (the ever-present vice of women), with one character named Glyke ("Sweetie"). Athenaios (567c) says that *Korianno* was a *hetaira* ("prostitute") – the verb *erân* ("love") occurs at F 77, and we may suspect that his *Thalatta*, *Petale*, perhaps *Tyranny* and *Pannychis*, were also plays with the titles bearing names of courtesans. Pherekrates is for the most part a comedian of the 430s, and unless we want to postulate for him a renaissance ca. 400 with these *hetaira*-plays, it seems that he was writing the domestic comedy about the *hetaira* well before 411. Like the mythological burlesque, the *hetaira*-play will become a staple of fourth-century comedy, but its origins can be traced back into the classical period of Old Comedy.

One ancient writer credits Pherekrates with having refrained from personal humor and introducing new themes. This makes more sense if this was a description of his whole career, and not just a later phase. We do not know, however, whether these sort of comedies had the linear plot with recognitions and re-unions that would characterize New Comedy. There is very little hint of any sort of “romance” in the fifth-century remains of comedy; the earliest would seem to be the love-duet at *Assembly-Women* 877–1111. There may be one exception here. In the *Life of Isokrates* we read that “the comedians were in the habit of making fun of important people, as they bring Sokrates on stage in love with young men.” Perhaps it was not comedy of “boy meets girl,” but of “boy meets man.”

Political and topical comedy

As we have seen, some modern critics consider the institution of comedy (traditionally 486) as part of the political life of the 480s, a reaction against the aristocrats who had allegedly supported the Persians. But there is no real evidence for any sustained personal humor or topical theme before the comedy of Kratinos and his contemporaries of the 440s and 430s. The 440s were also a crucial time for Athens: peace with Persia, hostilities then truce with Sparta in 446, the ostracism of Thoukydides, the revolt of Samos. Described by Platonios as “an emulator of Archilochos,” the author of an *Archilochoi* with parodies of that iambic poet, and described by Aristophanes (*Knights* 528) as “sweeping all his enemies before him,” Kratinos was likely the poet who made major comic capital out of topical personalities and issues and developed the aggressive and vigorous stance of the comic poet. But there is no conclusive evidence that his comedies were politically saturated from start to finish; certainly his mythological burlesques seem to have been parodies of myth first and political tracts second. The last sentence of the **hypothesis** to Kratinos’ mythical burlesque, *Dionysalexandros*, asserts that “in the play **Perikles** is very convincingly made fun of by innuendo for bringing the war on the Athenians,” but this does not have to mean that Dionysos is meant to represent Perikles throughout the comedy or that the Trojan War is meant to cover the **Peloponnesian War** as a whole. All that the hypothesis may mean is that at some point in the comedy “Perikles was very convincingly made fun of because of the war.”

Political and topical comedy reaches its high point in the last three decades of the century, and it was probably Aristophanes who raised it to that height. With his caricature of Kleon as Paphlagon in *Knights* he pioneered the demagogue-comedy. Here an entire comedy is dedicated to an attack on a single politician; whether the comic poet is actually indulging in outright political propaganda or catering to a popular taste must remain an unsettled matter. Much has been written of the seemingly conservative stance adopted by the comic poets, and caution should be exercised here. In the demagogue-comedy he was followed by Eupolis with *Marikas* (Hyperbolos), by Platon with three comedies of this sort (*Kleophon*, *Peisandros*, *Hyperbolos*), and perhaps by Theopompos (*Teisamenos*) and Archippos (*Rhinon*). Given the topical nature of

Archippos' *Fishes* (F 14, 23, 27–8) and the fact that he is attested as the author of four plays by Aristophanes, we may wish to include him in the political style practiced by the canonical Three.

It is worth distinguishing between the presence of personal jokes and a deliberate larger topical theme in a comedy. Eupolis' *Spongers*, for instance, was written around the figure of Kallias. Protagoras and possibly Sokrates and Alkibiades appeared in the comedy and there are jokes at various spongers of the day (F 172, 177–80), but it is hard to see any political theme here – these *kômôidoumenoi* are made fun of for their personal lives, not their politics. In the fourth century personal jokes can be found as late as the plays of Menander, but the political joke per se at a prominent figure is an early casualty.

Thus when we find jokes even at political figures throughout the fragments, there is no guarantee that these came from intensely political plays of the sort that Aristophanes reveled in. It is clear that Eupolis' *Cities*, *Marikas*, and *Demes* (and perhaps his *Golden Race*, modern Athens being an ironic antithesis of the good old days) were political comedies, and we might wish to include some plays by Platon here (his *Greece or Islands*, *Envoy*s, *Alliance* suggest themselves). But these plays by Platon seem to be early in his career, and one can make the argument that the intensely political comedy that we take as typical of Old Comedy was really only a vogue, a very successful one, of the last third of the century. Begun with Kratinos and his caricature of Perikles as Zeus, it was perfected by Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Platon, and reached its apogee with the demagogue-comedy where the comic poet took on one particular target. It is a tempting and entirely natural conclusion that this implies personal conviction on the poets' part and has allowed many modern critics to talk of the Old Comic poets having a "Cimonian bias" or as operating as a sort of unofficial political opposition. Kimon (Cimon) was a major political leader at Athens from 480 to 450. He favored rapprochement with Sparta, open hostilities with Persia, and an easy hand on the allies. His ouster in the late 460s marked the sea-change in external and internal politics at Athens that find expression in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. He tends to be well treated by comic poets and many critics see Aristophanes and others advocating policies in line with his. But care must be exercised here. To make fun of someone or something is not necessarily to attack it. Comedy often follows the popular lead and it is difficult to detect instances where comedy had any definite effect on popular opinion or political policy.

"To make fun of by name"

Aristotle attributes the humor of Old Comedy (*Ethics* 1128a21–4) to what he calls *aischrologia* ("shameful language"), by which we would include not just the obscene language with which the text of Old Comedy is peppered, but also the abuse of persons outside the drama, for which we have a convenient one-word term, *kômôidoumenoi*, "those made fun of in comedy." Anyone coming to Old Comedy for the first time is struck immediately by the constant stream of jokes at real persons of the time, very

probably sitting among the spectators. These jokes can be just a quick cut-and-thrust, barely disturbing the flow of the action, as at *Assembly-Women* 166–8:

Praxagora: You fool, you did it again, refer to men as women.

Woman: It's all because of Epigonos. I saw him over there and immediately thought I was speaking among women.

Sometimes a series of one-liners form variations on a malicious theme, such as at *Clouds* 340–55 where the clouds take various forms depending on whom they see, culminating with the observation:

So that's why they are women, they've just seen Kleisthenes.

Whole songs can be devoted to extended attack on a particular target, as at Kleophon at *Frogs* 674–85 or Kleon at *Knights* 973–96. The latter is the only place in *Knights* where the Kleon-character (Paphlagon) is actually called “Kleon.” Was Aristophanes creating here a stand-alone song that would be on everyone's lips? Finally a character in the comedy may be a real Athenian, sometimes with name disguised (Kleon as Paphlagon, Lysimache the priestess of Athene as Lysistrate), but more often with identity perfectly clear. The best-known instances here are the appearance of Sokrates in *Clouds* and that of Euripides in at least five comedies. In *Acharnians* as many as five (or even six) of the *dramatis personae* represent real Athenians.

The ancients were obsessed with this distinctive feature of Old Comedy, principally because it was conspicuously absent from later drama. When one ancient writer attempts to explain the origins of Old Comedy, he tends to explain the presence and rationale for personal jokes. When another writer attempts to account for the change in comedy in the fourth century, he concentrates on the loss of personal humor and the influence of outside political forces. The pragmatic Romans were quick to find a “redeeming social value” in the personal humor of Old Comedy, in that it attacked men who deserved to be singled out. Here is the opening to Horace's fourth satire (late first century):

Eupolis, Kratinos, and Aristophanes and indeed all the poets of Old Comedy, would single out with great freedom anyone who deserved to be pointed out, for being a wicked person or a thief, an adulterer, a pickpocket, or in any way notorious.

The notion that a comic poet might be making fun of a target unfairly or just for the fun of it was not one that the ancient critics found comfortable, nor for that matter do some modern critics.

The ancient commentator, Platonios, writing at some point between AD 100 and 500, perceptively connects personal abuse in Old Comedy with the vigorous and flourishing democracy at Athens in the classical period. One of the hallmarks of that democracy was *parrhēsia* (“free speech”), and the comic poets of the last third of the fifth century took advantage of that privilege in the public atmosphere that was the theater. Ancient commentators were often hunting for laws and controls on

comedy by the state and frequently attributed the change in comedy in the fourth century to interference by the political authorities. In his *Art of Poetry* Horace gives what became the standard view of Old Comedy and personal abuse (281–4):

Then there came Old Comedy, which enjoyed considerable acclaim, but its freedom descended into an abusive violence that had to be regulated by law. A law was passed and the chorus fell silent, having lost its right of shameful abuse.

But this “law” is a later fiction, and only one stricture on comedy is actually documented, passed in 440/39 and repealed in 437/6. The ancient source reads *mē kōmōidein* (“not to produce comedy”), but as we know that comedies were produced in 437, *kōmōidein* must mean, as it often does, “to make fun of by name.” The early 430s were a critical time for Athens, both externally with the revolt of her major ally Samos, and internal infighting around Perikles. The decree might also suggest that personal humor was something new in the development of Old Comedy and that this legal measure was Athens’ attempt to come to terms with the increase of personal and political invective on the comic stage. In the end the Athenians preferred their comedy unregulated.

The Generations of Old Comedy

The early years

We know very little about the first generation of Old Comedians. The earliest attested writer of comedy is the very shadowy Sousarion, while the *Suda* names Chionides as the first official producer of Old Comedy and provides us with the canonical date for the start of Old Comedy (487/6), “they say . . . that he produced eight years before the **Persian Wars**.” Aristotle (*Poetics* 1448a33) links Chionides with Magnes as early creators of Attic Comedy.

We can say something more about Magnes. He is described by the *Suda* as being young when Epicharmos, the Sicilian comic poet, was old. Diomedes links him with Sousarion and Myllos in creating a comedy that was “less polished and charming.” One anonymous writer on comedy gives him eleven victories, the highest total of any Old Comedian. Aristophanes (*Knights* 518–25) implies that Magnes as an old man failed as a comic poet; this presumably was an event of recent memory. He won at the Dionysia of 472 (*IG* ii² 2318.7). If this was his first victory, we can infer a career from 472 to the 430s for him.

Aristophanes describes him as having “set up the most victories over rival choruses” and as “having spoken in every kind of voice for you, strumming the lyre, flapping wings, playing the Lydian, humming like a gall-fly, and dyeing himself frog-green” (*Knights* 521–4). This is explained by the scholiast as referring to actual play-titles (*Lyre-Players*, *Birds*, *Lydians*, *Gall-Flies*, *Frogs*). Of these only *Lydians* is attested by other sources, and one wonders whether the scholiast had any real evidence for these titles beyond the comic text. Aristophanes’ comments suggest that Magnes’ comedy was something more crudely humorous and less sophisticated.

Epicharmos

When we say “Greek drama,” our mind automatically turns to Athens. But in the fifth century Athens was not the only home of theater. In particular we may look to Syracuse in Sicily, whose tyrant Hieron (ruled 478–466) had in the first part of the fifth century established his city as one of the leading Greek states, not just in political and military influence, but in culture as well. All the great poets of the day, including Aeschylus himself, paid visits and plied their trade at the court of Syracuse. The remains of the great theater of the fifth century, heavily altered in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, reveal a structure of impressive size and sophistication.

Aristotle knows of a separate dramatic tradition for the West, principally that of comedy. At *Poetics* 1449b5–6 he attributes the creation of comic plots to Sicilian poets; earlier (1449a32–3) he has described a Sicilian comic poet, Epicharmos, as “much earlier than Chionides and Magnes” (two of the earliest comic poets at Athens). Ancient writers placed Epicharmos’ birthplace in various cities of the Greek world, but agreed that he was active principally in the city of Syracuse. One source dates him to the 73rd Olympiad (488–485), the *Suda* to “six years before the Persian Wars” (ca. 486). The Parian Marble dates him to the year 472/1, Clement of **Alexandria** to the reign of Hieron, too late to be “much earlier than Chionides and Magnes,” but a career in the late sixth and early fifth centuries does explain all the dates. He is credited variously with thirty-five, forty, and fifty-two plays. One writer sums him up, “he was the first to embellish comedy considerably and to make a ragged art-form into something substantial.”

Certain ancient critics saw him as both comic poet and philosopher – remember that early Greek philosophy was written in verse, usually the epic hexameter. Much of Norwood’s (1931) chapter is given over to exploring possible philosophical themes in his comic fragments. But it is more likely that this is the result of confusion with another Epicharmos – Diogenes Laertius (8.78–80) knows of a pupil of Pythagoras, Epicharmos of Cos, who migrated to Sicily and wrote on physics, ethics, and medicine – or the product of later attempts to link the comic poet with later serious thinkers. Diogenes Laertius (3.7–15) quotes the rhetorician Alkimos for a number of passages where Plato supposedly shows the influence of Epicharmos. His comedies probably expressed maxims and witty ideas, which were magnified into “philosophy.”

His play-titles suggest a fondness for the burlesque of myth, especially the stories of Herakles (*Bousiris*, *Marriage of Hebe*, *Herakles and the Girdle*) and Odysseus (*Cyclops*, *Sirens*, *Odysseus the Deserter*). One of the longer preserved fragments (F 278) contains an address in iambic trimeter to Eumaios, the swineherd in the second half of Homer’s *Odyssey*. F 72 of his *Cyclops*, “here, pour <this> into the cup,” suggests that this comedy, like Euripides’ later satyric *Cyclops* and Kratinos’ comedy *Odysseus and Company*, treated the encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops in *Odyssey* 9. Epicharmos adds an inventive touch in F 97 of *Odysseus the Deserter*, with Odysseus rehearsing a fictitious account of his success on a dangerous away-mission.

Like the later comedy at Athens, especially that of Middle Comedy, the fragments of Epicharmos have much to do with the pleasures of food. Almost all of the twenty

fragments of his *Marriage of Hebe* concern the marriage banquet of Hebe and Herakles, the latter now a god but still possessing his mortal appetite. Epicharmos' *Wealth* (F 32) provides an early look at a figure to become a staple of later comedy, the sponger. Eupolis' *Spongers* (421) will feature a chorus of these experts at cadging a free meal, F 172 consisting of sixteen lines chanted by the chorus about their style of life, and in both Menander and Roman comedy the sponger or parasite will be an instrumental in resolving the plot-line. The life of Epicharmos' sponger, however, is not a happy one, and this character trudges home to a cold and uncomfortable rest.

One might suspect that comedy produced under one-man-rule at Syracuse would lack the topicality that flourished under a democracy. But drama was used to glorify that city and its rule under Hieron, who is known to have officially sponsored "court poets," including Epicharmos and Aeschylus. Aeschylus in fact wrote his *People of Etna* to celebrate Hieron's refounding of that city in the 470s and restaged his *Persians*, in which Greeks triumph over a foreign foe. This was an appropriate choice since Syracuse saw herself as an outpost of Greek culture in the midst of Sicilian barbarians and hostile Carthaginians. Hieron had won a crucial victory over the Carthaginians in 480 at Himera, the same year as Salamis, the battle celebrated in *Persians*. In the fragments of Epicharmos we find references to contemporary coinage, weights and measures, institutions, festivals, local settings, writers (including Aeschylus [F 221] and Aristoxenos [F 77]). His comedy may not have been as politically based or as personally humorous as later Old Comedy at Athens, but it was rooted in the Sicily of his day.

Epicharmos' plays contain some intriguing anticipations of later comedy. We have already mentioned the figure of the sponger, and the possible overlap in the plays of about Cyclops and Bousiris. From his *Philoktetes* (F 131) comes an idea that Kratinos will use in his *Wine-Flask* (423-D), "there is no poem as long as you drink water." F 123 (*Skiron*) contains a question-and-answer session, which the scholiast saw as the source of *Peace* 185–7. In his *Herakles and the Girdle* the hero is confronted with "an army of Pygmies on rather large dung-beetles, which they say live on Etna" (F 65). The hero in *Peace* (421-D) rides to Olympos on "a gigantic dung-beetle from Etna"; the immediate reference is to Euripides' Bellerophon and Pegasos, but a further intertextual allusion to Epicharmos' comedy is not impossible and would show that dramatic ideas travelled both to and from mainland Greece in the ancient world.

One of the mysterious aspects of Sicilian drama is that we know of original drama only in the first half of the fifth century, and then only of comedy. Epicharmos was not writing comedy in a vacuum, since we know of the comedians, Phormis and Deinolochos, the latter described as both rival and "son or pupil" of Epicharmos and who "wrote fourteen plays in the Doric dialect." Aeschylus produced tragedies there, and we have the poignant story (Plutarch *Nikias* 29.2–3) of how Athenian prisoners after the Sicilian disaster of 413 gained their freedom by reciting songs from Euripides for their drama-mad captors. Clearly his plays were known to a Syracusan audience. But we know of no Sicilian tragic poet in the fifth century. What serious plays then were performed in the great theater? Was there a local tradition of tragedy, or did they rely on restaging tragedies originally produced elsewhere?

Kratinos and the second generation

For Kratinos we have twenty-four reasonably secure titles, some substantial fragments (including ninety lines from the *parodos* and a subsequent scene of *Wealth-Gods*: F 171), most of the hypothesis to *Dionysalexandros*, and a fair idea of the plot of his brilliantly **metatheatrical** *Wine-Flask*. We also possess a variety of ancient assessments, which must be used with care, but which provide for the first time an individual personality. Two important things happen to comedy at this time: (1) the institution of dramatic competitions at the **Lenaia** in the late 440s which would double the number of comedies produced, and (2) the development of political and personal themes in comedy.

One anonymous writer says of Kratinos that “he won after the 85th Olympiad” (440/39–437/6), but this would result in an improbably short career (twenty-four plays in about sixteen years). More significantly his name is restored on the victors-list for the Dionysia, two places after Euphronios, winner in 458. We should thus place his début in the 450s. On the victors-list for the Lenaia, Kratinos is fourth in chronological order. Since these productions began in the late 440s, this might explain the date in the early 430s. At the lower end we know of productions for 425-L (*Tempest-Tossed*) and 424-L (*Satyrs*) and *Wine-Flask* at 423-D, and then a joke from *Peace* (700–3: 421-D):

Hermes (speaking for Peace who has been absent since 431): Well then, is Kratinos the great <poet> still alive?

Trygaios: He died, when the Spartans invaded.

Hermes: What happened?

Trygaios: He fainted, he couldn’t bear to see a jar full of wine smashed.

As the Spartans had not invaded since 425 and Kratinos was alive and well in 423, he could not have died during a Spartan invasion, and the joke may just be a crude back-dating of his actual demise in 423 or 422 or possibly a total fiction. But as no fragment or play requires a date after 423, it is fair to set his career as roughly 454–423.

Aristophanes’ descriptions of Kratinos are a blend of respect and abuse. We must always be careful with compliments from of a comic poet, since if Aristophanes builds Kratinos up in one passage, it may be only to bring him down in the next. From *Knights* 526–36:

Then with Kratinos in mind, who flowing with a wave of praise coursed through the open plains, sweeping headlong from their roots oaks and plane-trees and enemies. Singing at a party had to include “Goddess of Bribes with fig-wood shoes,” and “Makers of clever hymns.” He was great then. But now you look on and have no pity for him in his dotage. His frets have fallen out, he’s lost his tuning, and his harmonies full of holes. An old man, he stumbles about like Konnas, with withered crown and dying of thirst. Because of his previous victories he ought to have a lifetime of free drinks in the Council House, and instead of spouting nonsense should be sitting splendidly beside Dionysos.

we observe the following: the previous success of Kratinos, the image of a torrent sweeping all before it, the existence of “enemies,” and his reputation as a writer of

songs. But note also the clever put-down: “he was great then, but now . . .,” he should have retired long ago instead of “spouting nonsense” – and remember that Kratinos was competing against Aristophanes at 424-L. Elsewhere Aristophanes plays on Kratinos’ alleged drunkenness (*Knights* 400, *Peace* 700–3), makes a series of enigmatic allusions at *Acharnians* 848–54 (“his hair always cut in the adulterer’s style”), and wishes at *Acharnians* 1168–73 that Kratinos be hit in the face with a fresh turd. As so often with comedy, allusions to a comic target become complimentary after that person’s death, for at *Frogs* 357 familiarity with comedy is “being initiated into the rites of bull-eating Kratinos.”

One anonymous writer calls him the comic Aeschylus, while another attributes to him the establishment of formal comedy. He is often seen as a “blame poet,” who “would attack more bitterly and shamefully than was necessary” (*Life of Aristophanes*). It would be useful to know if any of these writers had ever read Kratinos. Similarly Platonios creates a spectrum between the rough and graceless directness of Kratinos and the charming elegance of Eupolis, with Aristophanes as a good Aristotelian mean. His position as the earliest of the canonical Three and his equation with Aeschylus have combined to create this picture of the rough genius, the grand old man, the immediate predecessor of Aristophanes.

Of the twenty-four or so secure titles (about 500 fragments) four comedies deserve particular mention. First there is *Odysseus and Company*, a parody of the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops in *Odyssey* 9. Platonios (I. 29) says that this comedy had neither “choral parts nor *parabases*” nor any personal humor, only the parody of the *Odyssey*. The latter may well be true; none of the thirteen fragments contains any personal jokes, and the play has been plausibly dated in the period of the decree *mē kōmōidein*, “not to make fun of by name,” (439–436). But the plurals in F 148–151, the firm mention of “you trusty companions” at F 150.1 and statement of F 151 in a lyric meter (“our homeland is Ithaca and we sail with god-like Odysseus”) make it clear that there was a chorus in this play. It would be interesting to know how closely this comedy resembled Euripides’ *Cyclops*, the satyr-drama based on the same material, and which dramatic treatment was the earlier.

Wealth-Gods provides the only extended piece of Kratinos (F 171), some ninety mutilated lines from a second-century AD papyrus, the sense of which is difficult to follow. The first lines, in anapestic dimeter, are clearly from the *parodos* of the comedy and explain to an interlocutor that “we are Titans by race, and were called ‘Ploutoi’ (‘Wealth-Gods’) when . . .” (11–12). Some lines later we learn:

now that the rule of tyranny is over and the *dēmos* rules, we have rushed here seeking our ancient brother, even if he be old and decrepit. (22–26)

The “ancient brother” might be Kronos, Ploutos, the Athenian *dēmos*, or (most attractively) Prometheus. Many have identified the end of tyranny and the rule of the *dēmos* as an allusion to the brief removal from office of Perikles in 430/29 (Thucydides 2.65) and thus date the play to 430 or 429. But it is not necessary to read such a serious or consistent political level into Kratinos. The humor of the passage may just be that the political experience on Olympus parallels that at Athens in the late sixth century

(tyranny replaced by democracy). F 172 and 176 (along with F 171) show that *Wealth-Gods* employed the theme of the Golden Age, familiar from Hesiod, and given the prevalence of utopian themes in Old Comedy, we may conclude that the bulk of the humor lay in the juxtaposition of that ancient ideal era with modern Athens. It remains uncertain whether there are any serious politics in *Wealth-Gods*. In the latter part of F 171 the chorus seems to be putting on trial those who acquired their riches unjustly. Since one of these, Hagnon, was a known associate of Perikles, some have assumed that the point of the comedy was to correct what was wrong with Athens, i.e. Perikles and his supporters.

We have already mentioned the clever burlesque *Dionysalexandros*. Here the fragments (F 39–52) are not very revealing, and we must depend upon the papyrus remains of the hypothesis (*POxy.* 663). The plot-line is clear: a comic parody of the Judgment of Paris, set on Mount Ida, in which Dionysos replaces Paris (also known as “Alexandros”) for both the actual judgment and the consequences. Paris himself eventually appears and the story of Helen and Paris (and the Trojan War) continues in its traditional form. The chorus was composed of satyrs, more appropriate perhaps for a satyr-drama, but attested elsewhere for comedy. Dionysos appeared in his familiar comic role as anti-hero, being the object of the satyrs’ laughter, running for cover at the advent of the angry Greeks, and being handed over to them for humiliation and punishment at the end.

The hypothesis ends with the intriguing statement, “in the play Perikles is very convincingly made fun by innuendo for bringing the war on the Athenians.” Most regard “the war” as the Peloponnesian War (431–404) and thus date the play to 430 or 429, before the death of Perikles in 429. But an equally good candidate for “the war” is the Samian War (440/39), which popular opinion blamed on Perikles and his foreign mistress Aspasia. Thus the Trojan War, a “war for a woman,” could become a mythological allegory for the Samian War, and the comedy dated to the early 430s. As this is the period of the decree *mē kōmōidein* (“not to make fun of by name”), the need for innuendo could be thus explained. Some see the comedy as one large political allegory, with Dionysos/Paris intended to refer throughout to Perikles, but there is no guarantee that the allusion to Perikles was an extended one, that “in the play” means “throughout the play,” or that Dionysos/Paris would have been recognized as Perikles. The comedy may just have been an amusing mythological burlesque, with a song or a *parabasis* that applied to Perikles or that Paris’ appearance in some way denoted Perikles.

Finally there is *Wine-Flask*, the comedy of 423-D which defeated *Clouds* and aroused Aristophanes’ comic ire. This was a metatheatrical piece which took its inspiration from Aristophanes’ dismissal of him at *Knights* 526–36 (“his lyre has lost its strings,” “perishing of thirst,” and “spouting nonsense”). Kratinos made himself the main character in this comedy, depicted as having abandoned his wife (Comedy) for a mistress (Methe, “Drunkenness”). A chorus of friends tries to recall the poet to his senses, but from there the ultimate direction of the comedy is unclear. F 199 shows a man contemplating how to “stop him from drink” and F 203 contains the famous defense “you cannot create anything great by drinking water.” It is entirely possible that Kratinos’ friends did not succeed and that the poet made his case that drink, the

vice that Aristophanes makes so much of, was necessary for his craft, indeed for a productive “marriage” with Comedy. Certain of the fragments suggest a scene where a comedy was being composed.

This clearly was a masterpiece of intertextuality, inspired by Aristophanes’ caricature in *Knights*, and perhaps (as several suggest) on Kratinos’ own earlier self-portrait. What is bold is the merging of author and plot, and the willingness of Kratinos to present himself in an unflattering light, something that Aristophanes could do only with difficulty and not without blaming someone else. It was a brilliant stroke and earned its author a well-deserved first prize at 423-D, a particularly satisfying one since Aristophanes’ play finished third.

Kratinos’ comedy possessed a political dimension, in part with frequent jokes at prominent leaders (Kimon, Perikles, Lampon, Hagnon, Lykourgos, Androkles, Kleon, Hyperbolos), and in part with the use of contemporary issues. Several of the ancient sources fasten on the abusive aspect of his comedy, and we should regard this as one of his major contributions to comedy. But was his comedy as obviously political as that of the next generation, especially the demagogue-comedies of Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Platon? Was every mention of Zeus a veiled (or not-so-veiled) allusion to Perikles? Were his mythological burlesques always meant to hide an Athenian situation? Too many critics have built complicated allegories based on one or two fragments, and have detected in Kratinos large-scale political satire, where there may only have been simply comedy. At least one-third of his comedies were burlesques of myth. We have already mentioned *Dionysalexandros* (the Judgment of Paris), *Odysseus and Company* (Odysseus and the Cyclops), *Wealth-Gods* (the Titans released), and from the titles and fragments can add the following burlesques of myth: *Bousiris*, *Runaways* (about Theseus), *Nemesis* (the birth of Helen), *Men of Seriphos* (Perseus), and *Chirons*. If Kratinos did bring a topical and political theme into these burlesques of myth, we suspect that these themes were subordinate to the parody of myth, and that it was Aristophanes who developed the overtly political comedy.

The older generation (Kratinos, Kallias, Telekleides, Hermippos) dominated Old Comedy in the middle third of the fifth century, and the victory-lists at the Dionysia show that no new poet won at that festival after Hermippos’ victory (435 at the latest) until Aristophanes with *Babylonians* in 426. We shall turn to the “next generation” in a moment, but we need to comment briefly on the other poets who preceded Aristophanes and Eupolis. They do not vanish with the advent of the new comedians of the 420s; indeed Hermippos, Pherekrates, and possibly Kallias continued to produce into the 410s and in the case of Hermippos we can perhaps detect a change in comic style. If comedy was reduced from five productions per festival to three during the war, then these older comedians may have found it harder to get a look-in, given the immense early popularity of Aristophanes and Eupolis. That they can be glimpsed again in the 410s, when presumably the reduction was reversed (at least from 420–416), seems entirely reasonable.

Norwood (1931: 145–77) spoke too confidently of “the school of Krates,” and saw in this poet as well as Pherekrates, Phrynichos, and (quite improbably) Platon a “school” which produced a different sort of comedy from that of the abusive topical and political style of Aristophanes and Eupolis. It is safer to see them as individuals

operating within a larger and varied comic framework rather than creating “schools.” Krates’ career belongs to the 440s and 430s; the reference at *Knights* 537, “he endured your anger and abuse,” seems to point to an event of recent memory. The *Suda* mentions seven plays and gives six titles; one anonymous writer assigns him seven plays, another eight.

The ancient descriptions of Krates’ comedy are: (1) Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1449b5), “of the Athenians Krates was the first to abandon the iambic form and to write whole plots and stories,” (2) the statements of an anonymous writer that “he succeeded Kratinos, was a very funny and humorous poet and the first to bring drunken people on stage in comedy,” and that “Pherekrates was an actor for and emulator of Krates and also refrained from abusive language”; and (3) the description of Krates at *Knights* 537–40, “kneading very refined ideas from his very dry lips.” These do suggest a poet creating a different form of comedy, one that in the eyes of Aristotle was the ancestor of comedy in his day. To some extent the meager fragments bear out this assessment. No title suggests an obvious political theme, nor are there any examples of personal humor. But it is hard to see where the “whole plots” would come in. The only substantial remains are two fragments 16–17 from *Beasts*, where two figures debate the nature and realization of an ideal society, passages which do not seem radically different from other such descriptions in Old Comedy. Perhaps the comedy, which sparked the “anger and abuse” of the audience, was a late play in Krates’ career, competing unsuccessfully with the new political comedy of Kratinos.

Pherekrates (career: 440–400) deserves a more prominent place in the history of Greek comedy. The anonymous writer links him with Krates, both as his follower and in his avoidance of personal abuse, and goes on to say that he “was successful by introducing new material and becoming an inventor of plots.” In one very late source he replaces Kratinos as one of the canonical Three of Old Comedy. The fragments bear out the ancients’ assessment. There are not many *kômôidoumenoi* among the nearly 300 fragments, and apart from a jibe at the dubious gender of Alkibiades (F 164), none is aimed at a political figure. In fact most of the *kômôidoumenoi* in Pherekrates are poets or musicians. There is no hint in any of the titles of a political comedy or anything like a demagogue-comedy. His *Korianno* seems to have been a domestic comedy with a woman in the main role, while his *Chimney* or *Pannychis*, *Thalassa*, *Petale*, and *Old Women* appear also to have been plays about women, especially *hetairai*. *Miners* and *Persians* seem to have had a Golden Age or Utopian theme. F 113 (*Miners*) presents a familiar catalogue, narrated by a woman, of the delights of a utopia located in the land of the dead, including the best of foods and deep red wine served by alluring maidens. F 137 (*Persians*) gives us part of a debate in anapestic tetrameters (a meter often used in the *agôn*) about the ideal life. Someone has said that wealth or the good life will eliminate those practicing the *technai*, to which our speaker replies that there will be no need of *technai*, since all things will be provided “automatically” (a standard aspect of utopia).

Krapataloi provides fascinating echoes of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, all the more so since Pherekrates’ is almost certainly the earlier play. Pollux 9.83 tells us that *krapatalos* was a unit of coinage in the underworld (confirmed by F 86), while F 85 instructs someone how to get to Hades (cf. *Frogs* 117–64). Thus this comedy may well have been a liter-

ary play in the style of *Frogs*, set perhaps all or in part in Hades, especially as F 100 (“I who built up and handed on to them a great art”) is known to have been spoken by Aeschylus. The plural title should refer to the chorus, but is a chorus of coins too daring for Old Comedy? Perhaps the significance is metaphorical, that the members of the chorus were people called *krapataloi* for whatever reason – a compare our idiom “small fry” or “tiddlers.”

Wild Men, dated to 420-L, seems to have been part of a comic theme in the 410s of escaping to the wilds (cf. *Birds*, *Hermit* in 414). Plato (*Protagoras* 327cd) tells us that the wild-men (presumably the chorus) of the comedy were *misanthropoi*, “who possessed neither education nor law-courts nor laws nor any necessity to practice virtue.” If *Birds* is any guide, the comedy featured one or two men from civilization (very probably Athens) who go the wilds looking for a better life (F 10) and discover that the “wild men” are hardly congenial neighbors (F 14). Pherekrates did write plays of mythological burlesque: *Human-Herakles*, *Deserters* (F 28, gods complaining about men), *Ant-Men* (F 125 is addressed to Deukalion, the survivor of the Flood), and perhaps *Tyranny* (F 150 concerns the gods and sacrifices). If the bulk of his career belongs in the 430s and early 420s, these comedies with the utopian theme and those with burlesque myth fit very well with other comedy of that period.

But his longest fragment (F 155 – *Cheiron*) is certainly the most intriguing.* Pseudo-Plutarch (1141c) records that “Pherekrates the comic poet brought Music on stage in female attire, her whole body mistreated, and had Justice ask the cause of her condition.” There then follows a description of her mistreatment by four dithyrambic musicians (Melanippides, Kinesias, Phrynīs, Timotheos), a clever series of double-entendres, mixing physical and sexual assault with the terms of music. This fragment has been the subject of recent discussions, which focus on the issue of gender, whether Music is to be seen as a virtuous wife or as a *hetaira* and how this fragment typifies an almost pornographic view of women by men. It is a very clever piece of comic writing and gives us a glimpse of a poet whom we are sorry to have lost, one who perhaps gave a different spin to comedy of the late fifth century and deserves a place of higher recognition.

Old Comedy: the next generation

In the early 420s four major comic poets appear on the scene with immediate success. Phrynichos and Eupolis (429), Aristophanes (427), and Platon (424 or a bit later) would be responsible for perfecting the intensely personal and political style which we associate with the high period of Old Comedy. If comedy of the 440s and 430s depended for the most part on the mythological burlesque and the themes of utopia and the Golden Age, with any political theme muted and indirect or limited to choral songs of abuse, then the 420s saw the development of more explicitly topical and political comedy, especially the demagogue-comedy that began with *Knights* in 424. In view of the tensions of the war, the factionalism of Athenian politics, the arrival

* This fragment is presented in full in the second chapter, “Euripides and the New Music.”

of the sophists, and the prominence of challenging artists such as Euripides and the “new musicians,” this may be seen as a natural reaction to life in interesting times.

Eupolis, the third of the canonical Three, was often seen as both friend and rival of Aristophanes. Much of this depends on how we take Aristophanes’ accusation (*Clouds* 551–8) of Eupolis’ plagiarism of his *Knights* to create *Marikas* and Eupolis’ reply in F 89:

As for those *Knights*, I helped the bald guy write them, and gave them to him as a gift.

His career was short: début in 429 and death in 411, most probably at the sea-battle of Kynos Sema. Ancient accounts assigned him fourteen or seventeen plays; we have fifteen secure titles, including a second version of *Autolykos*. In this short career he enjoyed considerable success, with three Dionysia-victories and four at the Lenaia.

At the beginning of the last century, the longest book fragment we had was F 172 (*Spongers*), a sixteen-line epirrhema in which the chorus of spongers describe their *modus operandi*. In 1911 the Cairo papyrus gave us three leaves (120 lines) from a book, containing material from Eupolis’ best-known comedy (*Demes*, F 99). Three papyri from **Oxyrhynchos** have yielded portions of commentaries to *Marikas*, *Men of Prospalta*, and *Officers* (F 192, 249, 267), while F 260 provides about thirty lines of a scene from Eupolis’ earliest comedy, *Men of Prospalta* (429).

Four comedies deserve special attention. First *Marikas* (421-L) did for Hyperbolos what *Knights* had done for Kleon. In Eupolis’ comedy Hyperbolos, who had become the leading demagogue after the death of Kleon in late 422, appears under the Persian name, “Marikas,” which denoted foreign origins, servile status, youth and roguery, and possibly homosexuality. Aristophanes would claim (*Clouds* 551–8, possibly also F 58) that Eupolis had plundered his *Knights* to create his *Marikas*, and examination of the fragments and commentary does reveal several points in common with *Knights*, even to the statement in F 201 (likely from the prologue) “that we are not being knights this time.” But Eupolis did not just serve a reheated *Knights*. The antagonist of Hyperbolos-Marikas is not a worse demagogue as in *Knights*, but one of the “rich and famous,” and the most striking change is the use of a double chorus, of rich men and poor men, each supporting one antagonist in the struggle (F 190, 192). A character playing Hyperbolos’ mother had a role in the comedy, probably in the final scene, where she appears to mourn her son and perform a vulgar dance, a scene which Aristophanes alleges Eupolis has stolen from the comic poet Phrynichos.

In the same year (421-D) Eupolis won first prize with *Spongers*, in which he made fun of the extravagant life-style of Kallias son of Hipponikos, recently come into his inheritance as the richest man in Greece, whose house is beset with philosophers and expensive parties. The fragments reveal that Kallias is the polar opposite of his thrifty father (F 156), that Protagoras appeared as the pretentious expert (F 157), and that a feast of massive proportions is being planned. The chorus was composed of professional “spongers,” who are not, as some have supposed, philosophers themselves. There is some evidence that Sokrates and Alkibiades appeared in episodes in this comedy and as the opening scene of Plato’s *Protagoras* gives a similarly comic look at Kallias’ ménage of tame philosophers, one wonders if Plato got ideas for his

dialogues *Protagoras* and *Symposium* from Eupolis' comedy. It is an attractive supposition that the feckless Kallias was despoiled of his fortune and came to financial ruin at the end.

Baptai had quite the reputation in antiquity, and several sources combine to produce the long-running story that this comedy was directed against Alkibiades, who not only produced a witty couplet in response to his treatment by Eupolis but also wreaked vengeance on him during the voyage to Sicily. He supposedly either drowned him or just dunked him in the sea, at the same time bringing the freedom of Old Comedy to an end. The play featured the arrival at Athens of Kotyto, a wild goddess from the north, and her reception by the chorus of *Baptai*, whom the scholiast to Juvenal (II.92) describes as "Athenian males dressed as women dancing in honor of Kotyto." The meaning of the title remains a mystery since "*Baptai*" occurs only in connection with this comedy, clearly based on the verb *baptein* which means either "to dip" or "to dye." The most prevalent suggestion is that these devotees were "baptized" into the rites of Kotyto, but the title "*Baptai*" surely suggests agents, "dippers" rather than "dipped ones." Perhaps these effeminate males were dyeing their clothes or preparing robes for the new goddess. It is not at all clear whether Alkibiades was the subject of the entire comedy, or just made fun of in one memorable and visual scene. Most critics assume the former, but one must be careful not to assume too much.

Finally there is *Demes*, likely produced in 417, although a traditional view prefers 412 in the aftermath of the disaster in Sicily. In this play four former leaders of Athens (Solon, Miltiades, Aristides, and Perikles – the last dead for only twelve years) returned to Athens from the dead, where they interacted with modern denizens of the city, and presumably in good Old Comic style put things right in their city. F 99.78–120 gives part of an encounter between Aristides the Just and a *sykophantēs* – a difficult word to translate, but one meaning a person who zealously initiated legal prosecutions and appears in comedy as a mixture of "informer" and "blackmailer." The play turned on the familiar comic opposition of old (good) / modern (inferior) – see F 102–4, 106, 111, 129–30 – and F 131 makes it clear that the Four were honored by the chorus at the end.

The main character was named Pyronides, the "son of fire," an appropriate name for an Old Comic protagonist. If *Demes* was anything like an Aristophanic comedy – the two most likely parallels are *Peace* and *Birds* – Pyronides will have been distressed by the state of Athens of his day and sought the aid of deceased leaders, whom he raises through a necromancy. The *agōn* should belong after the return to Athens and would resemble that of *Lysistrata*, the issue being in this case turning the state over to the Four. The episodes represent the working-out of the grand idea, as each of the Four encounter an appropriate foil and put things right in their field. A south Italian vase by Assteas (ca. 370) shows a comic scene, where a character named "Pyronides" drags off a reluctant musician named "Phrynis," known from several comic passages as a contemporary musical innovator. Phrynis, it seems, was a typically unwelcome intruder on the comic scene, manhandled in good comic fashion by the protagonist.

It is not immediately clear what a chorus of "demes" should be. Were they an individuated chorus, consisting of twenty-four different demes – here compare Eupolis' *Cities* where the chorus was comprised of cities of the empire (F 245–7)? Or should

“deme” be taken in its most natural sense, as “country-town” as opposed to the city? Here one may wonder why Eupolis did not just create a chorus of country-folk? At F 99.11–15 the chorus complains about “those in the Long Walls, for they eat better than we do.” The obvious inference is that the chorus is less well off than even these temporary residents of the city.

Eupolis’ comedy seems to have closely resembled that of Aristophanes. Topical and political themes are prevalent, although only three or four comedies appear to have been overtly political (*Demes*, *Marikas*, *Cities*, and perhaps *Golden Race*). Eupolis created his comedy out of prominent personalities: *Spongers* (Kallias and his household), *Autolykos* (the boy-athlete known from Xenophon’s *Symposium*), *Baptai* (Alkibiades), *Demes* (Perikles), *Officers* (the general Phormion). We get also the familiar comic figure of Dionysos in *Officers* (“Dionysos joins the navy”), but what we fail to find is large-scale literary parody, like that of Euripides by Aristophanes. For all his reputation and considerable success, the fragments do not show a comedy of the same depth and brilliance as that of Aristophanes. We can agree with Platonios that “Eupolis comes up with great ideas for his plots,” but also with Silk (2000b: 310) that there is “nothing to suggest that Aristophanes learnt anything about writing poetry from him.”

With Platon we meet a poet, who like Aristophanes wrote well into the next century and thus spans the transition to Middle Comedy, if that term is at all meaningful. More than one ancient source makes him the chief exponent of Middle Comedy. The *Suda* assigns him twenty-eight plays and lists thirty titles, to which we must add *Security* (*Rhabdouchoi*), unknown before the publication of *POxy*. 2737. Since the figures for Aristophanes and Eupolis indicate an average of one production per year, on a début of 424 Platon will have been producing well into the 390s. Secure dates are 405 (*Kleophon*) and 391 (*Phaon*); likely dates are *Feasts* (410s – F 29–30), *Victories* (410s – F 85–6), *Peisandros* (mid 410s), *The Man in Great Pain* (410s – F 114–16), *Envoys* (390s – F 127), *Sophists* (late 400s – F 150), *Hyperbolos* (early 410s). The Dionysia victors-list (*IG* ii² 2325.63) lists him after Kantharos (winner in 422), Phrynichos, and Ameipsias, suggesting that his first victory came in the 410s.

The thirty or so titles reveal a variety of subjects and treatments. There are three instances of the demagogue-comedy, pioneered by Aristophanes in *Knights*, against Peisandros, Hyperbolos, and Kleophon, where we see that familiar elements of the comic depiction of the politician: foreign origin and speech, crooked behavior, an unflattering portrayal of the mother, arrogant behavior, servile origins. Whereas Aristophanes and Eupolis disguised their demagogues under suggestive names (Kleon ~ Paphlagon, Hyperbolos ~ Marikas), Platon attacked his demagogues openly by name. Certain other titles imply topical themes: *Greece or Islands*, *Feasts*, *Ambassadors*, *Alliance*. Four titles suggest literary, metatheatrical, or intellectual comedies: *Laconians or Poets*, *Security*, *Sophists*, *Properties*. So far we have a poet very much in the style of Aristophanes. But perhaps one-third of his total output are mythological burlesques: *Adonis*, *Europe*, *Zeus Mistreated*, *Io*, *Laios*, *Menelaos*, *Long Night*, *Phaon*. It is tempting to conclude that these two styles are chronological and the mythological burlesques reveal a poet leading the way into the fourth century and into Middle Comedy. But mythological comedies by their atypical nature do not easily yield their dates, and

Platon may well have written plays like *Europe* or *Laios* from the start of his career. That there are so many mythological plays implies that, unless Platon was especially prolific in the 390s, he began to write this sort of comedy well before the end of the fifth century, at a time when Aristophanes was still creating his intensely topical comedies such as *Lysistrata* and *Frogs*.

Old Comedy: the final generation

The last poets of Old Comedy pale beside the great figures of the 420s. Many are but names, others have only a few titles attested. Perhaps the comments of Dionysos on the state of tragedy in 405 apply equally well to comedy, apart from Aristophanes and Platon (*Frogs* 92–4):

These are just small fry, chatterboxes, “halls of swallows,” degraders of their art, who get their one chorus and then are gone, after pissing on Tragedy.

But we can usefully call attention to three comic poets of Old Comedy during its last generation.

First there is Archippos, to whom the *Suda* attributes one victory in the 91st Olympiad (415/2). The *Life of Aristophanes* records that some attributed four of Aristophanes' forty-four comedies to Archippos. Is this another possible instance of collaboration between Old Comic poets? Was Archippos, like Philonides, producer for Aristophanes as well as a comic poet in his own right? The similarities between his *Fishes* and *Birds* are worth considering in this light. His comedy, *Rhion*, probably has to do with Rhion of Paiania, a major figure in the democratic restoration after the Thirty (403), and his best-known comedy, *Fishes*, mentions “Eukleides, the former **archon**” (F 27), yielding a date after that his archonship in 403/2. We have here then a comedian of the late fifth century and very early fourth.

Of his six known titles two or three suggest mythological burlesques (*Amphitryon*, *Marriage of Herakles*, and perhaps *Wealth*). But it is *Fishes* that attracts the most interest. It seems to have done for fishes what *Birds* had done for creatures of the air, including a formal treaty between men and the fishes and the handing over to the fishes of those epicures who had enjoyed a diet of fish. A papyrus published in 1991 (the so-called “Comodia Dukiana”) may belong to *Fishes*, and contains over forty lines of connected text – a dialogue between a pair of characters expatiating on the superiority among fish of the *silouros* (sheatfish), where one finally declares that “Isokrates has never made such a praise of Helen as you have delivered over the *silouros*.” This is followed by instructions on how best to cook this prince of fishes and presented almost like an initiatory ritual. If actually part of *Fishes* – and there is some doubt here – it would give us more than sixty lines of Archippos' comedy, and make it one of the few lost Old Comedies of which we have any reasonable remains.

For Strattis the *Suda* lists fifteen titles, while an anonymous writer on comedy gives a total of seventeen plays. If his name is correctly restored on IG ii² 2325.138 (the Lenaia list), then he won one victory at that competition. Since according to Σ *Frogs*

146 his *Atalante* (or *Atalantos*) is “much later than *Frogs*” and mentions Lagiske (F 3), the mistress of Isokrates (436–338) in his old age, a date as late as the 370s has been assumed for that comedy. This would suggest a career from ca. 410 to the 370s. From the titles and ninety fragments, he appears to have shared Aristophanes’ fondness for literary parody, especially that of Euripides. His *Anthroporestes* contains (F 1) one of several allusions to the actor Hegelochos’ verbal gaffe in Euripides’ *Orestes*. His *Lemnomeda* seems to have been a combined parody of Euripides’ *Andromeda* and perhaps his *Hypsipyle*, and the titles of *Medea*, *Philoktetes*, *Chrysippos*, *Phoenician Women*, *Troilos*, and *Myrmidons* all strongly suggest burlesques of tragedy. His *Kinesias*, which may owe much to the portrait of that dithyrambic poet in *Birds*, contains the fine line from the prologue (F 16), “these are the tents of chorus-killing Kinesias.” Like Aristophanes, he made jokes against his fellow-comedians, Sannyrion (F 21, 57), Philyllios (F 38). Very few of the personal jokes in Strattis have a political flavor.

Another important lesser light from the same period is Theopompos, who appears on the victory-lists along with other late minor poets such as Nikophon and Polyzelos. The *Suda* gives a total of twenty-four plays, an anonymous writer seventeen; we have reasonably secure evidence for nineteen or twenty titles. References in the fragments suggest a career from ca. 415 into the 380s. We find examples of the burlesque of myth in titles such as *Admetos*, *Althaia*, *Aphrodite*, *Theseus* (F 18 suggests a journey for Theseus to Persia), *Odysseus*, *Penelope*, *Sirens*, *Phineus*. There are hints of the *hetaira*-comedy in his *Nemea* and *Pamphile*, perhaps also *Althaia* and *Aphrodite* (F 5 makes fun of Philonides, the object of Aristophanes’ joke at his relationship with Lais at *Wealth* 304). Of the hundred or so fragments, about a dozen contain personal jokes, and two titles may refer to contemporary political figures (*Kallaischros*, *Teisamenos*), although neither reference is certain, and *Teisamenos* could also be a mythological comedy based on the son of Orestes. *She-Soldiers* sounds as if it could be a comedy of the same sort as *Lysistrata* or *Assembly-Women* – F 58 refers to Anytos the democratic leader and accuser of Sokrates, and if *Teisamenos* refers to the law-giver of the late 400s, this might be a political comedy like *Knights* or *Marikas*. We suspect that we have here another comedian in transition, as the political and topical comedy of the earlier generation yields to something different in the fourth century.

Aristophanes

Old Comedy deliberately and often broke the dramatic illusion and allowed its choruses to speak directly to the spectators on behalf of their poets. Thus the ancient biographers had much more to work with than for the tragic poets, and much of what Aristophanes says his prologues or *parabases* is taken as “fact” into the ancient lives and the entries in the **scholia**. We do possess a *Life of Aristophanes*, rife with expressions such as “some say” or “according to others,” and as such is hardly serious biography. Aristophanes was creating a public persona for himself in his comedies: the young and ground-breaking comic poet, politically beneficial, but unfairly unappreciated. Aristophanes deliberately cultivates this image, but the biographical truth need not be the same.

That said, we can make the following reasonably confident assertions about the life and career of Aristophanes, son of Philippos, of the deme Kydathenaion. He was born about 450, although some have interpreted a reference at *Clouds* 528–31 as suggesting that he was not yet eighteen when he produced his first comedy in 427. He would have grown up in the golden years of Perikles, reaching his majority at the same time as war broke out with Sparta. His deme, Kydathenaion, one of the five demes within the city of Athens, was a well-off neighborhood, but we should remember that a man's deme was determined by where his paternal ancestor was living in 507.

Aristophanes' Life and Career

- ca. 450: birth, probably at Athens
- 427: début with *Banqueters* (not extant, probably second prize)
- 426-D: *Babylonians* (not extant, probably first prize) and subsequent row with Kleon
- 425-L: *Acharnians* (first prize)
- 424-L: *Knights* (first prize)
- 423-L: production (comedy unknown)
- 423-D: first version of *Clouds* (not extant, third place)
- 422-L: *Wasps* (second prize)
- 421-D: *Peace* (second prize)
- ca. 418: revised version of *Clouds* (not performed)
- 414-L: *Amphiareus* (not extant)
- 414-D: *Birds* (second prize)
- 411-L (?): *Lysistrata* (result unknown)
- 411-D (?): *Women at the Thesmophoria* (result unknown)
- 408: *Wealth* (first version, not extant)
- 405-L: *Frogs* (first prize)
- 393–391: *Assembly-Women* (result unknown)
- 388 – *Wealth* (result unknown)
- 387-D: victory through his son, Araros
- ca. 385: death

Aristophanes began his dramatic career with his *Banqueters* in 427 – a passage from *Clouds* reveals that this initial comedy fared well. For his first three or four plays he employed others as *didaskaloi* (“directors”), a practice which he continued throughout in his career. Initially this may have been due to his youth and inexperience with the theater, but he may just have preferred to leave the physical details to others. At the Lenaia of 422, it appears that he was responsible for two of the three plays performed: *Wasps* in his own name and *Precontest* through Philonides. There may well have been some subterfuge at work here. His early career has been the subject of some speculation, and depends on the interpretation of two passages from the *parabases* of *Knights* and *Wasps*. On one reading his early years as a comic poet had three stages: (1) aiding other comic poets (who?) before 427, (2) his début with *Banqueters* in 427

and subsequent productions of *Babylonians* (426) and *Acharnians* (425) through other men, and (3) the production of *Knights* in 424 in his own name. The more traditional reading makes (1) and (2) refer to the same event and sees only two stages in his career.

Aristophanes burst on the comic scene with a vengeance. For the fourteen festivals at which comedians could produce between 427 and 421, we can find at least nine plays by Aristophanes, perhaps as many as twelve. It seems that one could not go to the theater in those years and not see a comedy by Aristophanes. Another similar burst of activity can be detected from 411 to 405. But why are we never given a victory-total for Aristophanes? We know of so many victories by this poet, and so many for that, but for Aristophanes, silence. He did win victories at the Lenaia of 425, 424, 422, and 405, and also at the Dionysia of 426 and again in 387, but perhaps that was all he won out of his forty productions. Perhaps like Euripides, he had to wait for posterity for his greatest popularity.

Other personal details include a connection with the island of Aigina – see *Acharnians* 652–4:

That's why the Spartans are asking for peace and demanding Aigina back. They don't care about the island, they just want to take this poet from you.

The easiest explanation is that he or his father settled on Aigina after Athens expelled the inhabitants of the island in 431. At *Peace* 1173 the chorus describes a man from the tribe of Pandion complaining about seeing his name appear on the posted list for military service. The vehemence of the passage and the fact that Aristophanes' deme, Kydathenaion, belonged to this tribe makes one think that a personal experience lies behind this reference. By age thirty he seems to have become prematurely bald: at *Peace* 765–74 the chorus imagines that the triumph of their poet will be a boon to bald men everywhere. An inscription from the early fourth century records an Aristophanes of Kydathenaion as a *bouleutês* ("councilor"). If this is our Aristophanes, it would be the only indication of a public career for a comic poet whose dramas were political in all senses of the word. His comedy *Frogs* (405-L) was accorded the unprecedented honor of a second production, "because of its *parabasis*" according to an ancient source, although the occasion and significance of that second production is not certain. He had three sons, two of whom, Araros and Philetairos, followed their father as writers of comedy.

Old Comedy is largely defined by Aristophanes, and it requires careful examination of the other poets to get a fairer and larger picture of the genre. In fact Aristophanes seems not to have engaged in certain types of Old Comedy, specifically the burlesque of myth, and purely domestic comedy. He had the advantage of arriving in a developed tradition of comedy, and if we look at his early play, *Acharnians* (425), we observe that his distinctive style of comedy is already formed. Either he inherited an established comic tradition from Kratinos and others or (more likely) his own particular genius for comedy was with him from the start of his career. As his own chorus puts it a few years later (*Peace* 749–50):

he has created a mighty art for us and built it up to towering proportions with great words and concepts and language above the norm.

Aristophanic comedy is intensely political and topical, fuelled liberally with doses of personal humor. His comic themes are drawn from Athens of his day: peace with Sparta, political leadership at Athens, the Athenian legal system, ideas and intellectuals, Euripides and other dramatic poets, the position of women in a male-dominated society. Even when characters from myth intervene, the setting is still contemporary Athens, Dionysos seeking a tragic poet “to save the city” (*Frogs*) or arriving at Athens and encountering a demagogue (*Babylonians*), or a chorus of divine entities appearing at the “reflectory” of Sokrates (*Clouds*). Whereas later comedy will be concerned with personal relationships and centered on the *oikos* (“house”), the focus of a comedy by Aristophanes will be the *polis* (“city”). Even when a comedy has a domestic setting, as in *Knights* and *Wasps*, the political is never far away. In *Knights* the house is the city in allegorical guise, with the people (*dēmos*) becoming Demos:

our master has a farmer’s temper, he’s a bean-muncher, with a short fuse, Demos of Pnyx Hill, a bad-tempered, almost-deaf old man. (40–3)

When in *Wasps* the old man is encouraged to continue his jury duty at home, trying domestic cases, the political space has moved indoors.

The fundamental question in interpreting Aristophanes is still whether he is writing comedy or satire. In short, is there a “message” being conveyed along with the humor of the piece? Did Aristophanes intend his audience to act upon the advice that his characters or choruses were giving? Is his comedy propaganda? His plays are aggressive, with jokes launched at individuals and themes that deal with issues of the city. In *Acharnians* the war with Sparta is blamed on

not the city, I do not mean the city, but certain worthless guys, counterfeit types, valueless, badly struck, foreign currency. (515–18)

In *Wasps* the demagogues are allegedly exploiting the jury-system for their own political ends. In *Peace* the true supporters of peace are Athenian farmers and the Spartans, while others are either blocking or actively working against peace. In the parabasis of *Frogs* the chorus (or the poet?) makes specific proposals within the *polis*: amnesty for those implicated in the coup of 411, and the removal of the current crop of political leaders. It is frequently assumed that to make fun of something or someone is to display a serious hostility toward that target. That a comic poet could merely exploit for the sake of humor or even make up a joke out of whole cloth is seen as unworthy and unfair. Pseudo-Plutarch (*Comparison of Aristophanes and Menander* 854D) comments: “Aristophanes seems not to have created his poetry for the reasonable sort of man at all, but wrote his unseemly and indecent stuff for the ignorant, and his bitter insults for the malicious.” Satire, on the other hand, is understandable. One may not agree with the direction of the attack, but one can more easily understand the impulse.

As mentioned above, the ancients regarded personal humor as essential to Old Comedy, and here Aristophanes, along with Kratinos and Eupolis, was a master. Comedy shares with earlier iambic poetry both its vulgar and colloquial language and the technique of making fun of people. Archilochos (seventh century) and Hipponax (sixth century) both created literary targets for their poetry, targets that could be built up from poem to poem. One can read the caricatures of Euripides and Kleon as literary constructs, without necessarily assuming a serious attack. The modern analogy of the editorial cartoonist is aptly brought out here, and we must distinguish between the humorist who exploits his target for humor and the one whose purpose is satirical attack.

There are three principal developed caricatures in Aristophanic comedy: those of Kleon, Euripides, and Sokrates. In the case of the first we do seem to have hostile satire. It has been argued that demagogues were something new on the political scene in the 420s and that what is new is automatically the stuff of good comedy. But there is too much sustained and impassioned attack, the evidence of at least two public confrontations between Kleon and Aristophanes (*Acharnians* 377–82, 503–5; *Wasps* 1284–91), and the fact that both came from the same deme hint at a personal hostility. Kleon has suffered from a bad press in antiquity, especially since his two contemporaries (Aristophanes and Thucydides) had little use for him, a view that Aristotle (*Constitution of Athens* 28) later reinforced. It may well be that Kleon was not the self-motivated, corrupt, and ignorant political leader that comedy describes him, but an honest and useful player, and in that case that Aristophanes has performed a “hatchet-job” on Kleon, one that was funny and successful comedy (*Knights* won in 424), and at the same time a vicious attack. It is worth noting that in 424 the judges could award the prize for *Knights* to Aristophanes and some weeks later the people would elect Kleon general.

With the other two figures satire is less likely. What comes through again and again is Aristophanes’ appreciation for and fascination with Euripides. He is well steeped in the works of this tragedian, alludes to and parodies him repeatedly, and as we shall see, has redefined his art of comedy in terms of tragedy, “comedy too knows what is right” (*Acharnians* 500). Those who would see Aristophanes as a hidebound traditionalist have no problem with seeing him as hostile to Euripides and point to Aeschylus’ ultimate victory in *Frogs*. But the terms often applied to Euripides in comedy, *sophos* and *dexios*, are also used by the comic poet of himself. Aristophanes is not one of “us” making fun of Euripides, one of “them”; he himself is a *sophos poiētēs*, who asks “us” to admire and applaud him. Kratinos (F 342) joins Aristophanes together with Euripides:

“Who are you?” some clever spectator might ask, a word-quibbler, a coiner of maxims,
a Euripidaristophaniser.

Apart from the song following the victory of Aeschylus (*Frogs* 1483–99), there is little in Aristophanes’ caricature of Euripides that is hostile and much that laughs with him.

Sokrates is a more controversial *kōmōidoumenos*. The picture that Aristophanes draws in *Clouds* is blatantly untrue, apart from physical details (*Clouds* 362–3), and

makes him an archetypal sophist, which is something that Sokrates certainly was not. A sophist would teach all sorts of subjects (including science, rhetoric, grammar), receive pay for that teaching, teach his students in a school, and very often question the traditional portrait of the gods and accepted ethical norms. The real Sokrates indulged in none of this, but Aristophanes gives us the physical Sokrates of Athens in the guise of a sophist, and one must wonder why he presented such an untrue comic depiction. On the traditionalist view Sokrates is one more modern innovator, of whom Aristophanes disapproves, and the portrait in *Clouds* as intentional and hostile satire. But Plato in his *Symposium* (written ca. 380) places Aristophanes and Sokrates at the same dinner-party, with no hint that the comedian's presence is at all incongruous and Alkibiades in that dialogue can allude to *Clouds* with no hint of rancor. Thus on a second view the caricature of Sokrates is more humorous than hostile, that it may have been a joke that got away from its creator, that the popular prejudice against Sokrates, which Plato mentions with some indignation at *Apology* 19c, was not Aristophanes' intention with this comedy. A final view would see Aristophanes as one of "us" making fun of "them," the too clever Sokrates being one of "them." Neither Aristophanes nor his audience understood the difference between Sokrates and a sophist, and would not have cared. It will be clear that we favor the second view.

Aristophanes' comedy is full of parody, of the epics of Homer and earlier poets, of contemporary poetry, both the grand style of Pindar and the more avant-garde "new musicians," but especially of tragedy, and the plays of Euripides in particular. We have argued above that Aristophanes is not attacking Euripides as much as he is parodying him or making comic capital of such a prominent figure in the cultural life of Athens. Euripides appears as a character in *Acharnians*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Frogs* and very probably was a character also in Aristophanes' other *Women at the Thesmophoria* and in *Precontest* and *Plays*. The other poets of the time (Eupolis, Kratinos, Hermippos, Pherekrates) do not seem to have fastened on Euripides or indeed onto tragic parody to the same extent, and it is interesting that Aristophanes' fascination with Euripides begins with his very first plays. The titles and fragments of certain lost plays (*Phoenician Women*, *Lemnian Women*) suggest that these were play-length parodies of Euripidean tragedies. In *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411) we get scenes that parody four different plays of Euripides and in *Acharnians* Euripides' lost *Telephos* (438) acts as a sub-text for the first half of the comedy.

But Aristophanes goes farther and defines his comedy in terms of tragedy. At *Acharnians* 499–500 he coins a new term for comedy, usually *kômôidia* but here *trygôidia*, "song of the wine lees," clearly intended to recall *tragôidia* ("tragedy"). Here the context is significant, spoken by Dikaiopolis disguised as a character from tragedy (*Telephos*), pleading a controversial case with contemporary political associations. Dikaiopolis is pleading to be heard, not only as a beggar among princes, but as a comic poet among his fellow-citizens. His culminating point is "comedy (*trygôidia*) too knows what is right" (500). Tragedy is serious drama with serious moral and cultural points to be made in the course of a tragedy. Here Aristophanes is claiming the same serious and moral high ground for comedy and seeing his art as fulfilling the same function as tragedy.

Domestic comedy is noticeably absent from Aristophanes' extant plays. While houses and families can be the scene and subjects of his comedies, especially in *Wasps*, the dynamics of familial and personal relationships are generally ignored as a source of comic humor. Wives and husbands, slaves and children do appear in the comedies, but Aristophanes is not interested in making comic capital out of them. In *Clouds*, for instance, we hear of Strepsiades' marriage to a wealthy and shrewish wife (42–74), and we might well expect her to appear at some point to berate or harass her harried husband, but Aristophanes passes all this up in favor of scenes between father and son. We meet Chremylos' wife in *Wealth*, but again the domestic comedy is incidental and dominated by the narration of the healing of Wealth. We have some evidence of domestic humor in both Kratinos and Pherekrates, but Aristophanes explored another aspect of the relationship between the genders.

This we get in the three so-called "women's plays" (*Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, *Assembly-Women*), where women invade the larger public space, usually restricted to men. This, of course, has been a principal theme in tragedy, most notably in *Oresteia*, *Antigone*, and *Medea*, but in comedy the transgression is successful. In *Lysistrata* the women occupy the Acropolis to take possession of the treasury and thus impede the prosecution of the war, and use their normally passive role as sex objects to their advantage, bringing the husbands of Greece literally to their knees. It takes a woman at the end to instruct both Athenians and Spartans in their proper relationship – "I may be a woman, but I have a mind, and no small amount of intelligence" (1124–5). In *Women at the Thesmophoria* the women of Athens take Euripides to task for his derogatory treatment of women in his tragedies and succeed in fighting the clever poet to a draw. But beneath the literary theme lurks the Athenian political process. The meeting of the women is a closely worked parody of the assembly, at a time when the democracy was under threat and in fact would be suspended only weeks later. Similarly in *Assembly-Women* the main character Praxagora ("she who acts in public") persuades the women to dress in their husbands' clothes, attend the assembly in male disguise, and vote to establish a new order with women in charge. This new order, incidentally, bears a striking resemblance to the fifth book of Plato's *Republic*.

At the same time Aristophanes does exploit the stereotypical male-oriented view of women for comic value: women as addicted to wine, food, sex, and gossip. Lysistrata herself admits that this stereotype will be the saving grace of their cause:

But that's exactly what I think will save us, the saffron dresses, our perfume, sandals, rouge, and see-through robes. (46–8)

A little later her plan, the sex-strike, is revealed:

Lysistrata: We must abstain from . . .
 Myrrhine: From what? Tell us.
 Lysistrata: So you'll do it?
 Myrrhine: We will, even if we must die.
 Lysistrata: Well then, we must abstain from . . . sex.
 Myrrhine: I can't do that. Let the war continue. (122–4, 129)

In *Women at the Thesmophoria* Euripides' relative must prove he is a woman by reciting what the women did at last year's celebrations:

- Woman: Tell me, what was the first thing we did in the ceremony?
 Relative: What was the first thing? We had a drink.
 Woman: And what was the second thing?
 Relative: We had another drink.
 Woman: Somebody told you!

But to this stereotype Aristophanes adds a public role for women, and in one passage puts words in Lysistrata's mouth that must have struck uncomfortably on the ears of a largely male audience (587–97). One could look at these women's plays as strictly absurd humor and as a way of making fun of the male citizenry, by showing that women can accomplish what men cannot, but Aristophanes does expect his main characters and choruses to be “on side,” and there is more than a little empathy in his depiction of women.

One feature that particularly strikes the student approaching Aristophanes for the first time is the wide range of humors that he employs. From complicated metrical and lyric parodies and allusions based on a good knowledge of tragedy or contemporary ideas, he descends to physical slap-stick, bowel humor, colloquial and obscene language. Much of the latter is typical comic stuff, part of what the audience would expect in certain scenes. Intruders come on stage and are driven off with comic violence, opponents in the *agôn* exchange insults and abuse before the actual contest (especially at *Knights* 335–81 or *Clouds* 889–948). Characters are humiliated physically in embarrassing situations: the *sykophantēs* packaged up like a pot at *Acharnians* 910–58, the beating-scene of Dionysos and Xanthias at *Frogs* 605–74, the unmasking of Euripides' relative in *Women at the Thesmophoria*. *Lysistrata*, in particular, operates largely at what we might call a “low level.” The prologue seethes with sexual innuendo, with Lysistrata examining Lampito as if she were a prize heifer. The chorus of old men can barely climb the steep slopes of the Acropolis, only to be doused with pitchers of water from the women. The *proboulos* enters backed by his Scythian archers (the Athenian police force), who are summarily dismissed by the women. Myrrhine (“Myrtle bush,” a slang term for the female genitalia) seduces her husband (Kinesias, “Mover”) and takes him to the brink of sexual satisfaction, only to leave him at the crucial moment. The Spartan herald arrives in a state of sexual excitement, prompting the first known version of a famous line attributed to Mae West:

- Kinesias: Who are you, a man or a fertility god?
 Herald: Young man, I am a herald from Sparta, come about the peace.
 Kinesias: Then why have you got a spear under your cloak?

Finally the negotiations are conducted over and around the naked figure of Diallage (“Reconciliation”), complete with some bawdy double-entendres.

Aristophanes, like many of the poets of Old Comedy, engages in the great game that involves poets, rivals, and spectators. Old Comedy never lets the spectators forget that they are watching a play, and Aristophanes will address them directly in the

prologue, the *parabasis*, choral interludes, and at the end of the play. The spectators, and through them the judges, are constantly cajoled, encouraged, taken to task, and brought back onside again. To listen to Aristophanes, we would believe that he was the unappreciated genius of the comic stage, who gave the citizens good advice about the state, who pioneered a brilliantly new and original sort of comedy, and who had to contend with vulgar rivals and unappreciative audiences. But all this must be taken with a grain of salt. The rivalry and bitterness that Aristophanes displays are as much poses as they are serious biographical facts.

Above all, Aristophanes is a poet of brilliant wit and imagination. A play by him depends on a fantastic idea, rooted in the reality of the times, but allowed to proceed in the most imaginative and unexpected manner. Plays move rapidly, from scene to scene, pausing for the set pieces of the *agōn* and the *parabasis*, and he is always careful not to let a serious section go on too long. Above all Aristophanes' comedy is always unpredictable. In *Birds* who would have foreseen at the beginning that two old men fleeing Athens and all its problems would meet Tereus, a human of myth transformed into a bird, create a city in the clouds, starve the gods into submission, encounter a bevy of deities (Iris, Prometheus, Poseidon, Herakles), and that one of these Athenian refugees, Peisetairos ("Persuasive Companion"), will enter in splendor at the close, married to "Princess" and now supreme ruler?

Aristophanes is an aggressive comic poet. His plays tackle great issues of the day: peace and war, women and men, universal poverty, the Athenian democratic system and its leaders. Personal humor, along with his penchant for fantasy, remains the single most noticeable feature of his comic style. Modern readers and audiences, steeped in political correctness, may find him uncomfortable, some preferring the blander and less offensive comedy of Menander. In a penetrating observation Norwood (1931: 304) defined three aspects of comedy: "Wit, fun, and humour are each the amusing self-expression of one who envisages the incongruous. When the intellect is the function employed, wit results; when it is the imagination, fun results; when it is the emotions, humour results." The first two Aristophanes possesses in great abundance, but Norwood (1931: 298) denies him humor, "for he is without pity or reverence . . . he is almost everywhere metallic." He may be fond of the characters whom he has created, but cannot resist the temptation to laugh at them. Many have seen Philokleon in *Wasps* as the most sympathetic character in Aristophanes, but he loses the debate over the role of a juror to his son and at the end of the play must be guided by his son on proper social behavior. In the teaching-scene (1122–1264) he is the buffoon and the butt of the joke. Lines 650–1 and 1162–73 make it clear that Aristophanes identified himself with the son, rather than with the father.

Perhaps we may sum up this brilliant, vibrant creator of sublime fantasy again by looking to tragedy, the eldest of the dramatic sisters, with which Aristophanes appears to have been obsessed and which seems to have defined his view of comedy. In *Frogs* the *agōn* is between a poet who is morally and socially beneficial (Aeschylus) and one who creates real and appealing dramatic characters and situations (Euripides). At the start of his half of the *agōn* (1008–10), "Aeschylus" asks his opponent for a definition of a "good" poet:

Aeschylus: Answer me this, why should one praise a poet?

Euripides: For cleverness and for his counsel, that's how we make people in the cities better.

One suspects that Euripides, who spoke first, would have stood out for cleverness (*dexiotēs*), and Aeschylus for counsel (*nouthesia*), but Aristophanes might have contended that for a poet who exemplified both dramatic excellence and good advice one need to look no farther than the comic stage and Aristophanes himself.

Greek Comedy and the *Phlyax*-vases

Very few Athenian vases show comic actors or scenes from comedy. The so-called Perseus Vase (ca. 430: Storey 2011: 3.428) seems to show a performer holding a scythe on a raised platform with two seated spectators, but there is nothing to show that this was a public performance in the theater. A fragment of a vase (450–430: Storey 2011: 3.429) shows a performer in a *kōmos* wearing a body suit, over garment, and comic padding. Two vases from the 420s (Storey 2011: 3.450–1) by the same artist depict a piper accompanied by men dressed arrestingly as birds, wearing masks with crests and beaks, leotards, shoes with spurs, and furry shorts with tail-feathers and an erect phallus. The two figures on one of these vases (the “Getty Birds”) have been identified as members of the chorus in *Birds* (unlikely), the two contending Logoi in the lost 423 version of *Clouds* (possibly), and a performance that has nothing to do with comedy (most likely).

But from southern Italy we have over 250 fourth-century vases, traditionally called “*phlyax*-vases,” which show a variety of comic scenes. Of these Taplin (1993: 34) estimates that over 100 reflect formal dramatic performances, some parodies of myth, some with domestic scenes, some with crude knockabout humor. The characters depicted wear grotesque masks, padding in shoulders and buttocks, rumpled body suit, and limp *phalloi*. On some vases a mask presides over the scene, and on others stairs lead up to a platform on which the scene is displayed with a double door making it clear that we are have a staged performance.

The traditional name, “*phlyax*-vases,” comes from a local Italian farce (*phlyakes*), attributed to Rhinthon of Syracuse, who flourished at the end of the fourth century. This farce was also called *hilarotragōidia* (“happy tragedy”) in which “tragedy was transformed into comedy,” that is, burlesque of serious stories. On this interpretation these vases depicted scenes from local Italian performance and had no connection with Athenian comedy. But the vases belong to the period 400–320, far too early for the *phlyakes* which belong a generation later. One vase (the New York Goose Play: Storey 2011: 3.430–1) contains a line of dialogue in Attic, rather than the Doric of the West, and on the *Chorēgoi* Vase (see fig. 4.2) the word used is *chorēgos* (Attic) and not *choragos* (Doric). Thus an Athenian origin should be considered for the performances that these vases illustrate.

Taplin (1993) argued convincingly that one of these vases, the Würzburg Telephos (fig. 4.3), was not just a comic parody of the myth of Telephos, but was in fact



Figure 4.3 *The Würzburg Telephos*, showing a scene from Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria*, on an Apulian bell-krater, ca. 370. © Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg. Photo: K. Oehrlein.

depicting a scene from a particular Athenian Old Comedy, Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411, lines 688–784). The New York Goose Play (ca. 400) with its Attic dialogue should also represent an Athenian Old Comedy, the Phrynis Vase (Storey 2011: 3.432) is almost certainly showing a scene from Eupolis' *Demes* (417?), and the now-lost Berlin bell-krater (Storey 2011: 432–3) has been attractively identified as depicting the opening scene of *Frogs*. It is now generally accepted, although not universally so, that these vases should be considered to represent scenes from Athenian Old and Middle Comedy, which contrary to received opinion did travel to southern Italy and was known to audiences there. Identifying the plays behind some of the other vases has become an intriguing scholarly game: the *Choregoi* Vase with Aristophanes' *Precontest* (*Proagon*), a birth of Helen vase (Storey 2011: 3.444) with

Kratinos' *Nemesis*, the Chiron vase (Storey 2011: 3.433–4) with Kratinos' *Chirons* or Pherekrates' *Chiron*.

Middle Comedy

The earliest sub-division of comedy is that by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1128a23–5, probably from the 330s), where he distinguishes two phases: “former comedy” that relies on *aischrologia* (“saying disgraceful things,” probably a combination of obscenity and personal humor), and “modern comedy” which creates humor through *hyponoia* (“subtle suggestion”). Aristotle, writing before the début of Menander, the great exponent of New Comedy, is calling attention to a fundamental change in comedy, from the vigorous topical comedy of the late fifth century to the more polished and less offensive comedy of his time.

Later ancient scholarship regarded comedy as tripartite, identifying its three periods as “old” (*palaia* or *archaia*), “middle” (*mesē*), and “new” (*nea*). This was probably happened during the third century, among either the scholars at Alexandria or the pupils of Aristotle, following what we call the Peripatetic tradition. The three sub-divisions do not always agree, since the ancients actually had four periods to deal with: (1) the very early period of comedy (486 – ca. 455); (2) the high period of Old Comedy (late fifth century); (3) comedy between Aristophanes and Menander (ca. 380 – ca. 320); (4) the later comedy of Menander and his contemporaries. Most ancient writers ignore (1) and identify the three phases as: Old Comedy: roughly 440–385 (2), Middle Comedy: 385–320 (3), and New Comedy: 325–290 or so (4). But occasionally (3) is ignored in favor of (1), and the case has been made that an original sub-division into three, (1 “Old”) + (2 “Middle”) + (3 “New”), was made before the advent of Menander. This scheme had to be revised to take New Comedy (4) into consideration.

When one looks at the comedy of the fourth century, the first thing to be noticed is the drastic change in the role of the chorus. One cannot imagine *Wasps* or *Birds* or *Women at the Thesmophoria* without a chorus. In Old Comedy the chorus can act as an antagonist to the “great idea” or its enthusiastic supporter, at times the audience in miniature, at other times the mouthpiece of the poet. Aristophanes’ lyrics are a brilliant mixture of elevated language, sophisticated metrics, metaphors made concrete, clever and intelligent parodies. But in his last two comedies the chorus plays a role only in the first part of the play. In *Wealth* they have but one song, a parody during their entry of Philoxenos’ poem *Cyclops*, and thereafter the places between the episodes are marked merely <chorou> (“of the chorus”). Neither *Assembly-Women* nor *Wealth* has anything resembling a *parabasis*. By Menander’s time comedy has a formal five-act structure, separated by four interludes to be sung by a chorus that has no dramatic role in the comedy. More than a few Middle comedies, however, do have plural titles that suggest a chorus with some involvement in the action: Anaxandrides’ *Hunters*, *Nereids*, *Farmers*; Alexis’ *Prophets*; Euboulos’ *Garland-Sellers*; Antiphanes’ *Knights*, *Lemnian Women*, *Young Men*; Timokles’ *The Women Celebrating the Dionysia*, *Heroes*, *Men of*

Marathon. But not all plural titles will indicate the chorus. For instance, Alexis wrote a comedy called “Brothers,” which very likely refers, not to a chorus, but to characters in the play who were brothers (a pair such as that in Terence’s *Brothers?*).

“Middle Comedy” is most useful as a chronological term, “between Aristophanes and Menander,” rather than as a generic term. If the sands of Egypt were to yield a significant portion of a comedy, would we be able to assign it confidently to Middle Comedy on anything other than chronological grounds? Is there anything distinctive or idiosyncratic about Middle Comedy, or is it just comedy in transition? Some have tried to assign it distinctive characteristics. Norwood (1931: 41) writes, “The main topics of Middle Comedy are eating, sex, riddles, philosophy, literature, and life.” Students will be forgiven if they wonder what this excludes. A quick glance at the titles and fragments will show that the political intensity of Old Comedy has all but disappeared. The demagogue-comedy ceases to be found, because in the fourth century a demagogue was nothing new and (one suspects) because after the right-wing coups at the end of the fifth century, it was no longer funny (or safe) to make comedy out of the *dēmos* and its leaders.

Personal humor, however, does not die out immediately in the fourth century; in fact Menander in his *Samian Woman* (very late fourth century) can still launch a pair of one-liners at targets of the day (603–6). But the force of the jokes is tempered. There is not the same vitriol as Kratinos employed against Perikles or Aristophanes against Kleon or Platon against Hyperbolos. Often we smile at the joke rather than laugh at the victim. One aspect of Old Comedy that does disappear early in the new century is the strong political theme. When a political figure is made fun of in Middle Comedy, it is hardly ever for his politics, but for a personal detail: his appearance, his appetite, his sex-life, an unfortunate remark. For instance, Kallimedon of Aphidna belonged to an important political family in the fourth century and was an opponent of Demosthenes in the 330s and 320s. Comedy makes fun of him often, but for his appetite, nicknaming him “the Crab”:

If I like any other strangers [guests] more than you, may I be turned into an eel so that Kallimedon the Crab may purchase me. (Alexis F 149)

The man most frequently caricatured in Middle Comedy is Plato, whose Academy and philosophical teachings were the stuff of public gossip. One particularly clever fragment shows Plato and his pupils playing “Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral” with a pumpkin (Epikrates F 10). Comedy had always found humorous potential in striking ideas and the personalities of those who advanced them. Sokrates was caricatured in *Clouds* as a “new thinker,” with interests in teaching science, grammar, music, and “making the worse case seem the better.” The sophist Protagoras appeared in Eupolis’ *Spongers*, and Ameipsias’ *Konnos* (423-D) featured a chorus of named thinkers. In Middle Comedy we get titles such as Alexis’ *The Female Pythagorean* or Aristophon’s *Plato* or his *Pythagorean*. Alexis has a nice joke from his *Meropis*:

Woman: You’ve come just in time. I’m totally at a loss, walking back and forth like Plato, and have come up with nothing except tired legs.

In the last years of Old Comedy and on into Middle Comedy, the mythological burlesque achieves his greatest popularity. Of the four competing plays mentioned in the hypothesis to *Wealth*, three (*Admetos*, *Adonis*, *Pasiphae*) are clearly parodies of myth. A quick glance through the titles of those poets whom we can reasonably date to the years 410–380 reveals how prevalent plays were that made fun of stories and characters from myth. Aristophanes himself in his last comedies (*Aiolosikon*, *Kokalos*) turned to this form, Araros, the most successful of his sons, wrote an *Adonis* and a *Birth of Pan*. In particular, the comedies of such lesser lights as Philyllios, Alkaïos, Theopompos, and Nikochares are dominated by the burlesque of myth. Among the titles of Antiphanes and Anaxandrides, two of the leading lights of Middle Comedy, one finds many examples of the burlesque of myth, somewhat fewer in the titles of Alexis, who belongs later in the century, confirming the conclusion that parody of myth was a mainstay of comedy in the first half of the fourth century. Arnott (2010: 296) observes that burlesques of myth seem to be of two types: (1) the characters of traditional myths “redrawn as contemporary and often vulgar Greeks and barbarians,” and (2) parodies of contemporary tragedy, especially Euripides.

With the rise of domestic themes and settings comes what we would call “romantic comedy.” In particular, the prostitute (*hetaira*) becomes a familiar character in the fourth century – we have evidence for her in Old Comedy in the women’s plays by Pherekrates. Indeed some of the titles which one might take as suggesting a burlesque of myth could just as easily be describing courtesans. Were the Danae-plays by Apollonophanes and Sannyrion comedies about that mythical heroine or about a current *hetaira* named Danae? The comedian Alexis, in particular, wrote plays with female titles that hint strongly at the romantic themes that would dominate later comedy, both descriptions such as *Flute-Girl*, *Woman at the Well*, *The Lovesick Woman* and actual names (*Pannychis*, *Agonis*). This comedy of love, errors, and intrigue will become the heart and soul of later New Comedy and it is during the fourth century that it develops. The *Life of Aristophanes* says that in his late comedy, *Kokalos*, “he brings on stage rapes and recognitions and everything else that Menander emulated,” while the *Suda* says of Anaxandrides that “he was the first to bring on stage love affairs and rapes of girls.” Arnott (2010: 326–7) plausibly explains the apparent contradiction by arguing that Aristophanes introduced the love theme into a burlesque of myth, while Anaxandrides carried it over to a real-life situation.

In the fourth century we witness an increasing interest in character for its own sake, and we begin to see the comic stereotypes that will populate later comedy: the braggart soldier, the cunning slave, the expert cook or doctor, the young man in love, the object of his desire, the sponger (*parasitos*). These are not new characters to comedy, as most can be found in Old Comedy, but comedy seems to be moving toward a regular ensemble of such personalities. We find titles such as: *Heiress*, *Banker*, *Seers*, *Pimp*, *Doctor*, *Hunters*, *Wild-Men*, *Ephebes*, *Vine-Cutter*, *Soldier*, that reveal the sort of type characters that this later comedy was fond of portraying. The cook, in particular, becomes the arrogant expert, who lords his expertise over the incompetent amateurs who seek his services during the comedy.

The poets of Middle Comedy maintain an interest in their profession and, like the poets of Old Comedy, indulge in both intertextuality and metatheatricality. In his *Parasite*

Alexis makes a joke quite in the style of Old Comedy against Aristophanes' son, the comedian Araros (F 184):

I'd like you to taste this water. I have quite the deep well inside, with water more frigid than Araros

and in his *Epidaurian* (F 77) alludes specifically to a play by Timokles. We can find such titles as *Poets*, *Third-Actor*, *Lyre-Player*, and the very suggestive *Lover of Euripides* by Axionikos. From Antiphanes' *Poetry* (F 189) comes a well-known commentary on the relationship between comedy and tragedy:

Tragedy is a fortunate art-form in all respects, since first of all the plots are familiar to the spectators before anyone opens their mouth. The poet has to make just one allusion. If I say "Oedipus," all is known: father Laios, mother Jokaste, daughters, sons, what he has done, what he will suffer. Again if someone says "Alkamion," even children can recite it all: in a fit of madness he killed his mother, an upset Adrastus will enter and then leave. Then when they can't think of anything more to say and have completely screwed up their tragedies, they just lift the *mēchanē* like a finger, and the spectators are happy. But this isn't our situation – we must invent everything, new names, what's gone on before, what's happening in the present, the prologue, the resolution. If a Chremes or a Pheidon makes a slip, he gets hissed off the stage, while a Peleus or a Teukros can get away with anything.

The ancients regarded the principal poets of Middle Comedy as Platon, whom we have seen falls between Old and later comedy, with two distinct dramatic styles, perhaps in chronological sequence, and Antiphanes. The latter illustrates a growing trend in Greek Comedy, in that he was a foreigner come to Athens to practice his dramatic career. Ancient sources describe him as coming from Smyrna, Rhodes, Chios, and Larissa and as acquiring Athenian citizenship through Demosthenes. His birth is given as between 408 and 404 and his début between 388 and 384, suspiciously just after the production of Aristophanes' last extant comedy (*Wealth* 388). He typifies another trend in comedy, in that he is attributed with 260 or 280 or 365 plays, far more than the forty of Aristophanes or the twenty-five of Kratinos. He must have written comedies for production other than at Athens, and the size and scope of a fourth-century comedy must have been less than an intricately crafted comedy of Aristophanes. For Antiphanes, we know of over 130 titles and just over 300 fragments. He won thirteen victories at Athens, eight of these at the Lenaia.

His play-titles reveals a considerable number of mythological burlesques (*Adonis*, *Andromeda*, *Ganymede*), plays named after characters in professions (*Farmer*, *Charioteer*, *Doctor*), women in intriguing roles (*She-Trainer*, *Lady Javelin-Thrower*, *Fisherwoman*), plays with ethnic titles (*Egyptian*, *Man from Epidauros*, *Lemnian Women*), and comedies that sound like they could be romantic intrigues (*Adulterers* [F 159], *Woman from Corinth* [F 124], *Chrysis* [F 223]).

The comic poet Alexis seems to have had a very long career and thus will have spanned both Middle and New Comedy. He is described as either the uncle or the teacher of Menander; in either case he belonged to the generation earlier than

Menander. This is confirmed by the list of victors at the Lenaia, on which he appears five spaces after Antiphanes and fourteen before Menander. If we may trust the *Suda*, Alexis produced 245 plays, a number which some critics have found too high or which, if true, may include plays that he produced rather than wrote and which certainly indicates a very long career. This latter conclusion is supported by some outside allusions in the 300 or so fragments that we have. F 1 (*Angkylion*), 185 (*Parasite*) refer to Plato (d. 347) in the present tense; F 184 (*Parasite*) to Araros the comic poet, whose début belongs to 387. Thus a date ca. 350 is indicated. Timokles, a comic poet of the 330s and 320s, is mentioned at F 77, 113. F 116 (*Krateia*) refers to the family of "Antigonos the king" (ca. 305), while F 246 (*The Suppositious Child*), if correctly attributed to Alexis, mentions Ptolemy II and his sister in a context that belongs to the 270s. A career from ca. 350 to at least 275 would account for all the pieces of evidence that we have.

Given such a long career, we will not be surprised if we find different sorts of comedy in the titles and fragments that we have. Alexis did write some burlesques of myth: *Seven against Thebes*, *Helen's Suitors*, *Galatea*. The latter probably dealt with the love of the Cyclops for the nymph Galatea, the subject of a poem by Philoxenos in the 390s and parodied by Aristophanes in *Wealth*. Most common are plays that bear the titles of professions, presumably that of the main character: *Vine-Dresser*, *Dancing-Girl*, *Parasite*. This last may be the first use of this term for the professional sponger, called *kolax* in earlier plays. Plays with ethnic titles are also common and suggest the foreign connection that we find in later comedy: *Lemnian Woman*, *Epidaurian*, *Locrians*. An intriguing set of titles hints at items that must have been instrumental in the plot: *Lock of Hair*, *Altar*, *Letter*, *Ring*. Finally four plays imply a literary theme, of the sort that we find in earlier comedy or satyr-drama: *Archilochos* (the iambic poet portrayed anachronistically as Sappho's lover by Diphilos), *Aesop* (F 9 contains an address to Solon), *Linos* (the musician and teacher of Herakles), and *The Lover of Tragedy*.

A comic poet of considerable interest is the Athenian Timokles, active in the 340s and 330s. What we have reminds one strongly of Old Comedy. Plural titles as *The Women Celebrating the Dionysia*, *Heroes*, *Men of Marathon* are very much in the spirit of earlier comedy, as are *Philodikastes* ("The Juror-Lover," with echoes of *Wasps*?), and *Orestautokleides* (Autokleides, a contemporary politician in the role of the mythical Orestes). Of the forty or so fragments of Timokles' work, twenty contain jokes at real persons, some quite developed caricatures, such as those in F 15–16 aimed at the *hetaira* Pythionike, the metaphorical rendering in F 19 of Autokles as Marsyas and Aristomedes as Tereus, and the comparison of the orator Hypereides to a river (F 17):

Then you will cross the River Hypereides, flowing with fish, murmuring gently with sensible speech and then boiling over with compressed waves of purple prose . . . when well-paid, it waters the fields of its donor.

In F 4 Timokles accuses five politicians, including Demosthenes, of taking bribes, and in F 14 and 19 suggests that Aristomedes was a thief. Such direct political references, so common in Old Comedy, are much rarer in Middle Comedy. Timokles seems to be a throwback to a more savage sort of personal humor.

His plays also displayed sexuality and a use of vulgar language reminiscent of Old Comedy. One comedy was called *Konisalos*, after a minor Priapic deity, another *Kentauros* – for the aggressive sexual overtones of the centaur see *Clouds* 350. In F 5 (*Demosatyroi*) Ktesippos shaves so often that he belongs among women, not men. Pythionike in F 16 is “insatiable” in a context of a sexual double-entendre, and the jokes describing bodily functions in F 18 are as crude as anything in Old Comedy.

Timokles also engages with tragedy in the manner of Aristophanes: F 6 showing how comparison with tragic exempla “helps each man bear his own problems more easily”; F 17.1, a parody of *Prometheus* 717–18; and F 27 (*Orestautokleides*), where “around the wretched man sleep old women, Nannion, Plangon etc.” Here the Furies of *Eumenides* are replaced with aging *hetairai*, all the more appropriate in light of Autokleides’ alleged homosexual appetites. In good Aristophanic fashion Timokles breaks the dramatic illusion and addresses the audience directly at F 19.6–7, “B. Bad joke! A. But by the gods, stop [plural] and don’t hiss.”

Timokles’ overall *vis comica*, in the same league (if not the same division) as Aristophanes and Kratinos, makes one suspect that he was trying to recreate comedy of the Old style. It is worth noting that Timokles was an Athenian, in an age when comedy was becoming more and more international. Perhaps he might have succeeded if the world had not changed in the late 320s with the imposition of Macedonian rule and the advent of Menander.

Menander and New Comedy

The student who finishes reading *Wasps* or *Frogs* by Aristophanes and then turns to Menander’s *Samian Woman* or *The Grouch* is in for a shock. Both were Athenian comic poets, both competed in the dramatic festivals, both won prizes and delighted their audiences, but their comedy could not be more different. Aristophanes’ plays are intensely topical, passing quickly from one scene to another, very much bound up with the life of the *polis* of his time. His characters are often bizarre and over-sized figures with significant names. Menander writes a more universal comedy, usually in an urban setting, and with characters whose names and personalities are drawn from real life. Above all, Menander’s plays focus on the family, the *oikos*, and the relationships within it, be they father and son, husband and wife, brother and sister, boy and the girl next door. This is comedy of the neighborhood.

In an age when many of the comic poets came from abroad to ply their trade at Athens, Menander was an Athenian. His parents’ names were Diopieithes and Hegesistrate, and one tradition makes him the nephew or pupil of Alexis, a leading poet of Middle Comedy. A familial relationship is unlikely since Alexis came from Thurioi in Italy, but it is not impossible that a young man of good family could have had a prominent teacher. It is more likely, however, another example of ancient sources trying to establish a sequence of master-pupil relationships among the poets. A more trustworthy source makes him a pupil of Theophrastos, successor of Aristotle at the Lyceum, but again this could be a deduction based on Theophrastos’ set of sketches, called *Characters*, whose types share a great deal with the personalities in

New Comedy. Dates and biographical information are rare, but the following can be advanced with reasonable confidence:

Menander's Life and Career

342/1: birth at Athens

325 or 322 or 320: début with *Anger*

316: *The Grouch* (first prize at the Lenaia)

315: first victory at the City Dionysia

312: *Charioteer* (fifth place)

301: *Imbrians*

292/1: death, while swimming off the Peiraieus

The late fourth century was a very different time from that of Aristophanes. When in 338 Philip of Macedon defeated the southern Greeks at the battle of Chaironeia, it essentially put an end to any independent foreign policy for Athens. After the death of Alexander (323) a short-lived revolt (the Lamian War) resulted in a Macedonian occupation and the loss of Athens' political independence. When Demetrios of Phaleron, the ruler of Athens imposed by Macedon, was driven out in 307, it is said that Menander barely escaped a prosecution based solely on the fact that he was a friend of the deposed Demetrios. Even things in the theater had changed, since Demetrios of Phaleron abolished the *chorêgeia* in favor of a centrally run state sponsorship.

It became established "fact" that he had a mistress named Glykera ("Sweetie"), and a later writer, Alkiphron, created an exchange of letters between her and Menander, while the *Suda* describes him as "with keen mind, but crazy over women." These are probably nothing more than deductions based on the romantic themes of his comedy and the name of a *hetaira* in one of his plays. The *Suda* says also that he was squint-eyed, and at least two later artistic representations of Menander do show him with a definite squint. A third-century AD mosaic from Syria shows Menander and Glykera in the presence of Comedy.

His career then lasted for thirty years or so. The ancient sources credit him with just over a hundred comedies; we have ninety-seven reasonably secure titles. An average of three comedies per year suggests that, like Antiphanes and other poets of the fourth century, Menander wrote for production at Athens and elsewhere. Aulus Gellius (second-century AD) cites a figure of eight victories only, presumably referring to those at Athens. Martial 10.5.9 calls him "rarely crowned," while Manilius 5.475 describes him as "too learned for his city." Thus we may perhaps include him with Euripides and Aristophanes for having a less than impressive victory-total in their lifetimes. But Menander would soon acquire an immense reputation in the ancient world. His plays were staged again soon after his death, adapted into Latin by the Roman playwrights, and nearly fifty visual portraits of him are known. In addition scenes from his comedies show up in mosaics and frescoes from various locations around the ancient world, including the so-called House of Menander at Pompeii and

a third-century AD villa on Lesbos, whose dining room was decorated with mosaics showing scenes from Menander, several of which can be matched with the existing texts.

The writers of antiquity regarded him as one of the greatest writers of the Greek world, on the same plane as Demosthenes, Euripides, and Homer. Among the dozens of ancient references to him, Quintilian praises the clarity of Menander's comedy and regards the speeches put in the mouth of his characters as suitable models for the student of oratory. Ausonius in the fourth century AD advised his grandson to "read all that is worth reading. You should explore first the author of the *Iliad* and the romantic works of Menander." Pseudo-Plutarch's essay comparing Aristophanes and Menander, much to the favor of the latter, reflects the established view that these two were the leading lights and polar opposites of Greek comedy. He concludes with the question: "Why else should an educated man go to the theater, except to see Menander?" Perhaps the most extravagant assessment is that attributed to the Alexandrian scholar, Aristophanes of Byzantium (third century), "O Life, o Menander, which of you is the original, and which the copy?"

Menander and the other creators of New Comedy enjoyed their greatest success in their influence upon the Roman comic poets Plautus and Terence (ca. 220 – ca. 160), and through them upon most Western comedy down to the twentieth century. We have twenty-one plays by Plautus and six by Terence, which are self-confessed adaptations into Latin of Greek New Comic originals. Both Roman poets quite freely admitted their literary debts, announcing in their prologues the author and source of their own comedy. Although written in Latin for a Roman audience, the comedies of Plautus and Terence had Greek settings and characters with Greek names, and were called *fabulae palliatae* ("plays in Greek dress"). To the less cultured Romans a Greek source and setting carried a cachet of elegance and sophistication. Three of Plautus' comedies were adapted from originals by Menander (*Bacchides* from *Double Deceiver*, *Casket* from *Women Dining Together*, and *Stichus* from *Brothers*), while Terence claims to have melded Menander's *Girl from Andros* and *Girl from Perinthos* to produce his own *Girl from Andros* and Menander's *Eunuch* and *Sponger* for his own *Eunuch*.

Ovid (*Amores* 1.15) claimed that "as long as the cunning slave, the hard-hearted father, the wicked pimp, and the sweet young thing survive, there will be Menander." But posterity did not bear out this claim. Menander's immense reputation continued through the late classical age, but his plays were not included in Byzantine school-books and thus did not enter the mediaeval manuscript tradition. By the late nineteenth century Menander was known by his great reputation and almost a thousand scraps and quotations, often chosen as "familiar quotations" for their wit and brevity, e.g. "the character of a man is known by his speaking" (F 72). Why should the works of this celebrated creator of witty human comedy have been lost? Some think it was because his Greek did not conform to the rigorous standards of classical Attic Greek, by which only the pure would survive. Another possibility is that he was too well known, considered an "easy" or "elementary" author and not to be included among "serious" writers.

At the turn of the twentieth century critics lamented the loss of Menander and a complete play by him would have been on any classical scholar's wish-list. Wishes

can be granted, and in little more than a century Menander went from being an author known only in bits and pieces to one with scenes, acts, and entire comedies extant. The curtain began to lift in 1898, when the discovery on papyrus of eighty-seven lines of his *Farmer* provided us with the final scene to one act of that comedy. We now had a whole living scene with which to work. A more important discovery was that of the Cairo Papyrus in 1905, a collection of plays that included about half of *The Arbitrants*, and two acts each of *Samian Woman* and *The Woman with Her Hair Cut Off*. Now we had entire acts and could now see a comedy and its characters developed. Figure 4.4 shows a page from the Cairo Papyrus, the opening of the fourth act of *Samian Woman* (lines 616–51). Note the entry $\chi\acute{o}\rho\omicron\nu$ at the top of the page, the insertion of a speaker's name in the first line of text (MOS[CHION]), and the trace of the *paragraphos* at the left above the eleventh-last line, the usual notation for a change of speaker. In 1957 the Bodmer Papyrus yielded a virtually complete comedy, *The Grouch*, although with each successive discovery Menander was becoming less of an icon and more of a “normal” author, warts and all. *The Grouch*, in particular, turned out to be an early work, with far too many characters, some nice moments in the first and fourth acts, but an unfunny and gratuitous ending. The same book that produced *The Grouch* in its entirety also produced more of the *Samian Woman*, now giving us four of the five acts, and the opening two acts of *The Shield*, both of which display a more polished and mature comedian at work. An intriguing discovery in 1968 gave us about a hundred lines of *The Double Deceiver*, the play adapted by Plautus in his Roman comedy, *Bacchides*. For the first time we could compare a Greek original with its Roman adaptation and observe (what we should have expected) that Plautus was no slavish translator of his Greek original, but an innovative comedian in his right.

Menander's comedy is that of the *oikos*. Comedy has essentially moved from the wider community of the *polis* to the domestic realm of the neighborhood. Plots involve young men in love, the rocky course of true romance, mistaken identities, long-lost children, conflicts between parent and child. Running through all this is a comedy of errors, where characters think that they know the truth, and produce scenes of humor based on partial knowledge and mistaken assumptions. The third and fourth acts of *Samian Woman* feature three characters, each of whom thinks that he knows who has been sleeping with whom and who the parents of the infant are. In *The Shield* a young Athenian named Kleostratos is presumed dead in battle and a greedy uncle has designs on his sister and her inheritance. This comic “error” is cleverly handled by Menander, who opens the play with the return of the “dead man's” slave, followed by the actual prologue spoken by the goddess of Chance, who puts the spectators right. Thus the spectators are in on the game from the start and can appreciate the dramatic irony as the scenes unfold. *The Grouch* does not turn on any major comic errors, apart from Sostratos pretending to be a hard-working farmer in order to impress his girl's father.

By the time of *The Grouch* (316) the structure of comedy has altered greatly. Old Comedy was more unstructured farce or fantasy than tightly organized drama, with loosely connected episodes that followed more or less logically from what goes before. But the plays of Menander that we have show a tight five-act structure, each distinctly separated by a choral interlude with the playing space empty of the actors. The

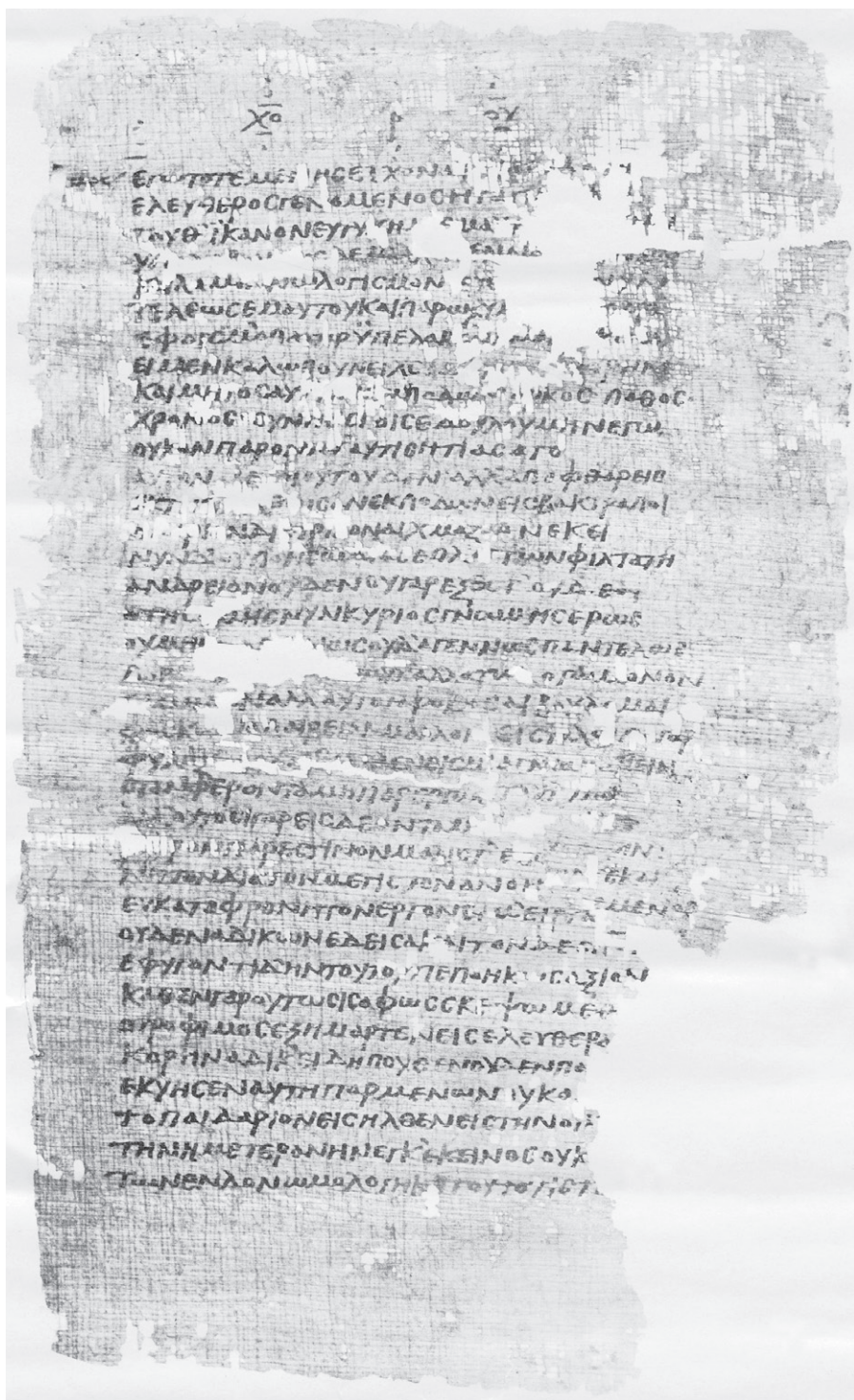


Figure 4.4 Cairo Papyrus, Plate XLV, Menander Samian Woman 616–51. Reproduced courtesy of the Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Studies, University of London, from The Cairo Codex of Menander (P. Cair. J. 43327): A Photographic Edition, prepared under the supervision of H. Riad and L. Koenen (London: University of London, Institute of Classical Studies, 1979).

plot-line is outlined in the first act, elaborated in the second, complicated and resolved in the third and fourth acts, with the fifth act (at least in *The Grouch* and *Samian Woman*) providing something of a coda to the action.

One of the most striking differences between New Comedy and earlier comedy lies in the role of the chorus. One cannot imagine an Aristophanic comedy without the chorus of metaphorical wasps or the hostile Acharnians or the exuberant women in *Lysistrata* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*, not to mention their intense *parabases* on behalf of their poet, their songs of personal abuse, or their exploration of their dramatic identity. But by the time of Aristophanes' last plays the text merely has <chorou> ("of the chorus") in several places, and in Menander this has become the rule. There is a chorus to be sure, but they enter to perform a song and dance between the acts with no dramatic identity or relevance to the comedy. At the end of the first act of *The Grouch* Daos exclaims (230–2):

I see some Pan-worshippers heading this way, to this very place, and they're quite drunk as well. I don't think it would be a good time to run into them.

In almost identical words Chairestratos in *The Arbitrants* says (169–71):

Let's be gone, since a crowd of young drunks is heading towards this place. I don't think it would be a good time to run into them.

New Comedy is almost exclusively the province of the actors and the character types that they portray.

Characters no longer bear significant names. We find no "Just City" or "Love Kleon" in Menander, but names borne by average Athenians: Sostratos, Nikeratos, Kleostratos, Smikrines. Settings are usually a city street before a house: *The Ghost*, *The Lyre-Player*, *Samian Woman*, *The Shield* ~ Athens, *The Woman with Her Hair Cut Off* ~ Corinth. Three comedies have more unusual settings: *The Grouch*, set before the shrine of Pan in rural Phyle; *The Arbitrants*, in a village on the east coast of Attica; and *The Girl from Leukas*, on a rocky point on the island of Leukas.

An Aristophanic comedy proceeds less on logic than on fantasy. Bizarre events occur with ridiculous and illogical ease (a city in the sky, a successful sex-strike, a ride on a dung-beetle to Olympos), but in Menander the plot proceeds in a realistic fashion, with twists and turns, contrived suspense, and skillfully delayed recognitions. Unlike Aristophanic comedy, "plot" does belong in the vocabulary of the critic of Menander. The spectators are in on the plot, usually from the start. In the prologue to *Samian Woman* Moschion admits that he has fathered a child on the girl next door and tells of the birth of another child by his father's Samian "wife;" in *The Shield* the goddess Chance makes it clear that Kleostratos is not dead. What Menander will do is bring the plot-line to fulfillment in a realistic manner, with unexpected turns of the plot, the believable interaction of his characters, and the tricks he plays on the audience. It is not so much the "what" as the "how." In the second act of *Samian Woman* Moschion and the girl next door are betrothed, precisely what everyone (including Moschion) wants and the spectators will be forgiven for asking what the problem will

be. But Moschion seems a little too eager and his suspicious father wonders what his real motive is, a suspicion that a chance utterance by an old nurse reinforces in the next act and thus sets off the chain of mistaken assumptions that dominate the third and fourth acts. Plutarch (*On the Glory of the Athenians* 347e) relates an anecdote, which, if true, speaks volumes about his technique of composing comedy: "The story goes that one of Menander's friends said to him, 'Menander, the Dionysia is getting close, and you haven't written your comedy.' Menander replied, 'I have indeed written my comedy. The plot is all worked out; all I have to do is add the lines.'" His first priority, it seems, will have been to work out the complexities of the plot-line and the inter-relation between the characters, and then to put the words in their mouths.

When Aristophanes of Byzantion commented, "O Life, o Menander, which of you is the original, and which the copy?," he was not talking about Menander's plot-lines or dramatic situations, unless Athens was populated with long-lost children miraculously discovering their parentage (and a well-off one at that), soldiers mistakenly presumed dead, boys seducing the girls next door, and an accompanying retinue of clever slaves, cooks, and spongers. Real life is not a series of happy coincidences, of recognitions and reversals, of rings and baby clothes appearing just when needed. Menander's comedies do depend on certain tried and true conventions of the comedy of errors, but these are but the surface workings of the plot-line. We should note also that the store of plots and characters is rather restricted. Poets seem not to have been aiming at bold new directions in comedy, but rather how to vary this standard material, which invariably would have a happy and satisfying ending. Ireland (2010: 334) concludes that: "What was important, therefore, was the not the end of result, since this was predictable, but how that end result would be achieved and how the obstacles to it would be overcome."

What Aristophanes of Byzantion meant was how Menander's characters come alive as truly breathing and whole people, how he constantly surprises his spectators and readers with a variation on type, how small scenes and descriptions imply much more about their personalities. A few examples will suffice. *Samian Woman* opens with Moschion, Demeas' adopted son, giving us the details of the plot. An adopted son might well be portrayed as a hellion, the ancient equivalent of our "preacher's kid," chafing at the bit and given to unruly behavior. But listen to his words:

Through my father's doing I became a man, and I repaid what I owed him in full – I behaved myself.

Of the two old men in *Samian Woman* Demeas is the deeper-minded of the two; he quotes tragedy, gets angry quickly, and then cools down just as rapidly. Nikeratos, on the other hand, is more abrupt, not too bright, and when he does put two and two together, takes a lot of calming down – "he's a tough old bird, shit-eater, completely set in his ways" (550). In *The Arbitrants* the "other woman," Habrotonon, has one eye on her future, "Do you think I want children? I just want to be free" (545–7), but earlier we have seen her doting over the baby and genuinely interested in the fate of its mother. Sostratos in *The Grouch* is a rather spoiled young man from the city, who

has fallen in love with Knemon's daughter at first sight ("did you get up this morning and plan to fall in love with someone?" [54]), but who acquits himself well in an interview with the girl's step-brother (306–13):

I'm a free-born man, with a considerable fortune; I'm eager to marry her without a dowry, and ready to take an oath always to love her. Young man, if I have come here planning to do anything untoward against you, may Pan himself and the Nymphs strike me dead right here by Pan's house.

Later he has an amusing scene when he returns sunburned from working in the fields to impress the girl's father, and in the fourth act will describe in a self-deprecating way how he did next to nothing while Gorgias rescued Knemon from the well. But later again he comes off well when he persuades his wealthy father that wealth is not the sole thing in life and not to demand a large dowry for his own marriage:

And so, father, I say that as long as you have money, you should use it generously, help people, do all the good that you can . . . Far better than a wealth which you keep hidden is a friend that all can see. (805–8)

Unlike Aristophanes, Menander is intimately involved in his characters. He may laugh at them but always with good humor. Even the great misanthrope Knemon (*The Grouch*) is given a chance to redeem himself by his *apologia pro vita sua* and his subsequent recantation. If Norwood was correct to deny "humor" to Aristophanes because of his lack of human empathy, then we can certainly attribute it to Menander, as one intensely interested in and sympathetic to the human condition.

Menander's comedy also provides a revealing window into the social norms of the late fourth century. The plots and situations may be dramatically contrived, but the characters and the background provide a context of reality for the spectators. From Menander we learn about the dependence of sons on fathers (*Samian Woman*), the position of the mistress in society (*Samian Woman*, *The Arbitrants*), the laws of inheritance (*The Shield*), the role of the *kyrios*, a woman's "protector" (*The Grouch*, *The Shield*), the proper behavior of women (*The Grouch*, *The Woman with Her Hair Cut Off*). Young men depended on their fathers for their livelihood; Moschion's only option for independence in *Samian Woman* is to join the ancient equivalent of the Foreign Legion. Chrysis (*Samian Woman*) may be a foreigner and thus unable to be Demeas' legal wife in Athenian law, but she is his *de facto* wife and mistress of his house. We witness the negotiations for a dowry (*The Grouch*), preparations for a wedding (*Samian Woman*), and the results of personal indiscretions at various festivals (Adonia ~ *Samian Woman*, Tauropolia ~ *The Arbitrants*). In this last play we watch an informal arbitration over a contested issue of ownership, with Smikrines deciding who owns the articles found with the child.

But although Menander's comedy does shed much light on the social background, it is just that – background. The drama is what counts, and the social world of a New Comedy is a "Neverland" of convenient recognitions and happy endings, an escapist construct rather than the real world. Audiences today expect social comment in their

comedy, and as far as we can tell this was not Menander's intention or the spectators' expectation. When Ireland (2010: 376) cites the modern observation that "the comedy of Menander is designed to raise a smile rather than a laugh," this demonstrates the danger of approaching an ancient text through reading, rather than by watching. To the reader in the study or the library, *The Grouch* can come across as dry and unappealing, but when staged with proper comic timing and antics can in fact provide a most satisfying and successful visual result.

Certain ancient writers attempted to establish a triad of New Comedy, presumably to match that of Old Comedy: Menander, Diphilos, and Philemon. As both Diphilos and Philemon wrote comedies that were adapted by Plautus, this may account in part for their inclusion in this later triad. Sometimes this triad is increased to five with the addition of Apollodoros and Philippides. Diphilos came originally from Sinope in the Black Sea region, but moved at an early age to Athens, where he became a fixture on the comic stage. One ancient source says that he "produced at the same time as Menander," but as he follows Menander on the victors' list at the Lenaia (three successes), we should assign him a career of ca. 320 into the third century. The same source assigns him 100 comedies. Of the sixty or so titles that we have, some suggest burlesques of myth (*Herakles*, *Daughters of Danaos*, *Theseus*, *Daughters of Peleus*), a theme seemingly ignored by Menander. Others imply situations appropriate to the comedy of intrigue (*Ignorance*, *The Heiress*, *Parasite*), others the type characters of comedy (*Soldier*, *Merchant*, *Painter*). The 133 fragments are especially rich in themes of food and the characters of the cook and the sponger. One of the two longer fragments, F 31 (*Merchant*) describes the competition in Corinth for food and drink, while in F 41 (*Painter*) one character describes to another the delights that await him in terms of food, drink, and sex.

Philemon of Syracuse seems to have been a larger player on the comic stage. His career began around 330, a little before that of Menander, with his first victory at the Dionysia in 327, and lasted well into the third century. By 307 he had acquired Athenian citizenship. The ancient sources attribute nearly a hundred comedies to him and a reputation almost equal to Menander's, with whom he is associated in several anecdotes. Quintilian (10.1.69) states in condescending fashion: "There are some other comic poets, whom, if you read with care, you can use to some extent, especially Philemon who was preferred to Menander by those with a lack of judgment, but who still deserves his unanimous second placing." A couple of titles (*Myrmidons*, *Palamedes*) suggest the burlesque of myth so common in Middle Comedy, but many of the titles are ethnics, suggestive of the principal character of the drama: *Babylonian*, *Thebans*, *Corinthian Woman*, *Rhodian Woman*. Several others suggest a stereotypical character: *The Property Disputer*, *The Youth*, *The Adulterer*, *The Soldier*. F 3 (*Brothers*) contains an intriguing invocation of Solon, the sixth-century Athenian law-giver, by a pimp, praising him for alleged sexual reforms making women available to all. Solon, it will be remembered, was a character in Kratinos' *Chirons* and also in Eupolis' *Demes*. *The Soldier* provides the longest extant fragment (F 82), a declaration in almost tragic style by a cook about to prepare a succulent fish. Of the several unassigned fragments of Philemon that exist, F 118 reveals well the fourth-century fascination for Euripides:

If in truth the dead have consciousness, as some maintain, then, gentlemen, I would gladly hang myself so that I might meet Euripides.

Here compare the earlier and intriguingly entitled comedies *The Lover of Tragedy* by Alexis and Axionikos' *The Lover of Euripides*, F 4 of which features a professional cook singing a parody of a tragic lyric on how to cook the dogfish.

In the third century drama moves elsewhere, although it continued to be written, performed, and appreciated at Athens. The great names of Greek tragedy in the third century are those of the scholar-poets of Alexandria, and we may wonder whether they were writing for a general public or the educated Greek court of the Ptolemies. We now realize that the so-called *phlyax*-vases of southern Italy are inspired by Athenian Old Comedy, which clearly crossed the Ionian Sea to Italy in the fourth century. In the late third century Greek Comedy again went west to Italy, as the Roman comic poets, notably Plautus and Terence, adapted New Comedy into Latin for Roman audiences. Tragedy followed comedy to Rome as well, where Euripides continued the posthumous popularity that he enjoyed in fourth-century Greece. The earliest Roman tragedians (Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius) found him as the principal source for their own tragic dramas. In Plautus' comedy *Curculio*, the title character enters muttering (591–2):

I have heard that an old poet once wrote in his tragedy that two women are worse than one,

an allusion perhaps to the sentiments of the chorus in Euripides' *Andromache* 465–70. In Plautus' *Rope* Scepharnio enters the morning after a violent storm and exclaims (83–6):

My God, that was some storm out at sea last night! The wind just about took the roof off. Wind? That was no wind, but something straight out of Euripides' *Alkmene*.

Unless Plautus was just slavishly reproducing the words from his Greek original, he expected his Roman audience of the early second century to have more than a passing acquaintance with Euripides.

Recommended Reading

Greek comedy

- Dobrov 2010: A collection of excellent and up-to-date essays by leading scholars on all aspects of Greek comedy.
- Handley 1985: A general survey by a leading authority on the thematic aspects of Greek comedy. Summary and good bibliography of the major authors.
- Lowe 2008: An excellent brief introduction to Greek and Roman comedy, with summaries of the major ancient authors and useful bibliographical notes.

Aristophanes

- Dover 1972: Some general essays on Aristophanes, followed by discussions of each extant play. Even after forty years it can still be recommended as an introduction.
- MacDowell 1995: Probably the best introduction to Aristophanes. MacDowell tends to take a conservative approach to Aristophanes' possible political stance.
- Rosen 2010: A first-rate and informative study of Aristophanes. Rosen steers an intelligent course between comedy as political satire and comedy as fantastic nonsense.

Old Comedy

- Bakola 2010: A first-rate introduction to Kratinos and some of the themes of his comedy, but not a systematic treatment of all the lost plays.
- Harvey and Wilkins 2000: A treasure-trove of newly commissioned essays on the poets and themes of Old Comedy.
- Olson 2007: An excellent introduction to Old Comedy, with a text, translation, and commentary on selected fragments.
- Rusten 2011: Rusten et al. provide a wealth of information about all periods of Greek comedy: ancient sources, visual evidence, translations of major fragments.
- Storey 2003: A systematic and comprehensive study of Aristophanes' comic rival Eupolis, with essays on each of the lost comedies.

Later comedy

- Arnott 2010: A comprehensive study of the genre and its major players, this should now be one's first reading about Middle Comedy.
- Ireland 2010: Now the recommended introduction to Menander and the other writers of New Comedy.
- Traill 2008: Traill investigates the mistaken assumptions made by characters in Menander (usually males) and moves to a perceptive analysis of his female characters.
- Walton and Arnott 1996: An intelligent and informed analysis of the performance aspects of Menander's comedy.
- Zagagi 1994: A careful study of the story-lines in Menander's comedy, showing how Menander raises a vulgar comic form to a sensitive and humane art.

Approaching Greek Drama

Greek drama is a literature rich in imagination and cultural history. The texts of each genre offer literary critic and student alike a treasure-house of information that has been explored from a number of different perspectives over the course of the twentieth century, with new approaches continuing to emerge in the twenty-first. In what follows we offer a necessarily brief overview of a number of different approaches that can be brought to bear on the content of dramatic texts, beginning with those that would be classified as the most literary approaches.

Formal Criticism

Because language is the basis of literature, the first approaches to appear were focused first and foremost on the words of the text. The Greek plays came to the modern world as written texts emerging from the manuscript tradition of the Middle Ages. For the reader with knowledge of ancient Greek, *textual criticism and commentary*, the hallmark of classical philology, remains an enduringly valuable way to study these ancient texts. This approach has a long pedigree, beginning in the third century BC with the scholars of **Alexandria**. However, it is with the German scholars of the nineteenth century that this philological approach has its modern roots. Because the ancient dramas were initially transmitted to us by means of repeated copying of the text by hand, textual problems (e.g., grammatical, metrical, lacunae) have entered the texts through the vagaries of the transcribing process. These in turn generate further semantic problems. The aim of textual criticism is, as far as possible, to get back to the “original” text, to what the playwright actually (or most probably) wrote, or at least to the “official” text established by **Lykourgos** ca. 330. In addition

to recommending corrections, textual criticism also involves identifying accretions in the manuscripts that were not part of the original text. To do this, one must develop a deep familiarity with the ancient languages and with a playwright's style (e.g., vocabulary, turn of phrase, meter, etc.) in order to spot elements in the text that are unlikely to be the dramatist's own.

In the commentary which accompanies the text, explanations of the problem with the received word or phrase are provided, previous emendations reviewed, and new suggestions recommended and supported by parallel uses of the recommended term in other texts. These decisions are based on more than what is possible metrically and grammatically; word choice is also informed by assumptions made about what the playwright wanted to say. The emendation must make sense both in the context of the sentence and in relation to the larger content of the play's general themes and plot. Commentaries proceed line by line, often word by word. Parallel expressions for a word or phrase are sought out, literary indebtedness explored, allusions in the text explained, metrical subtleties elucidated. Those who approach Greek drama in translation are deeply indebted to the work of textual critics and commentators, who through their labors have given us more accurate editions of the Greek texts on which to base our translations. Nevertheless, this approach does not really say much about how literature works to engage us as literature, and while many of the decisions to emend the text are informed by (usually) unexpressed interpretative sensibilities, its aim is not offer an interpretation of the whole text.

One example of this approach can be seen in the discussion of Sophokles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* 873, which contains a textual point of some magnitude. The received text gives *hybris phyteuei tyrannon* ("arrogance breeds a **tyrant**"). Neither the grammar nor the meter is problematic, but in the play **Sophokles** does not use *tyrannos* or *tyrannis* in a negative sense. Technically Oedipus is a *tyrannos*, a man whose rule was not inherited, and thus is called "tyrant" several times in the play, but in each context the term merely carries the sense of "king" or "ruler." In light of this, Blaydes suggested reversing subject and object: *hybrin phyteuei tyrannis* ("tyranny [being a king] breeds arrogance"), a common sentiment in Greek tragedy. The debate has been fierce and is not yet resolved.

New Criticism was an approach developed to redress a perceived shortcoming in traditional philology, but one still firmly located in the language of the text. Though now decidedly no longer "new," it continues to offer much of value to the reader. In New Criticism a literary text is viewed as a self-contained, discrete object for study. Between its first word and its last is contained all that is required to appreciate it as a work of art. Indeed, the project of New Criticism is to understand how literature is generated through a study of its form and content. This approach is deeply interested in identifying the structure, or component parts of a literary text, such as its plot, **episodes**, climax, and denouement and to demonstrate the ways in which language is employed to carry its themes within those structures. So identifying the motifs, imagery, ironies, and tensions in a text, as well as how other uses of language (e.g., metaphors, similes) contribute to the whole becomes an important element in analysis. Through what is termed a "close reading" of these elements and their interrelationship within a text, the critic traces how the tensions which build as the story progresses

are finally resolved by its end. Winnington-Ingram (1980: vii) well sums up the approach of the New Criticism: “the main function of criticism is the interpretation of individual works of art . . . each in its own unique form, quality and theme.”

However, New Criticism is not interested solely in how a particular text accomplishes the telling of its own story. It is also concerned with matters of interpretation. So for instance in a play such as Sophokles’ *Oedipus Tyrannos*, which has two plot lines, (1) the discovery of King Laios’ murderer and (2) the discovery of Oedipus’ parentage, a close reading of this text will reveal how the poet develops these themes by exploiting the tensions in a set of polarized terms carried in the play’s imagery (light and dark, sight and blindness, knowledge and ignorance), a tension also embodied in the play’s characters (especially Oedipus and Teiresias) in order to turn plot-line 1 into plot-line 2 and bring the action to its exciting climax where Oedipus realizes that he is the murderer of his own father, King Laios. For example, the Herdsman is summoned to identify the murderer of Laios, but in fact confirms the parentage of Oedipus. It then falls to the critical reader to interpret the play, to provide a commentary on what the play “means,” based in the way the language has been employed within its structure to lead one to a particular conclusion. Thus any interpretation of a drama must be supported by things said in the play itself.

New Criticism itself was deeply informed by the humanist tradition which dominated scholarship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The formal qualities of the drama are often seen to direct attention to the “tragic hero” as the locus of meaning; he becomes the (near) universal “everyman” whose dilemma expresses deep and universal truths about human nature and the relationship of humanity with the divine. Oedipus, unsurprisingly, in his quest to know and his inability to know fully, becomes the exemplarily tragic everyman, a status confirmed by the chorus at lines 1086–96.

A third text-based approach to Greek drama might be termed the *comparative* approach. This considers a particular representation of a mythical character or story in relation to other versions known from a variety of genres and media (e.g., epic, lyric, victory odes, visual arts). For critics taking this approach to tragedy the important term in assessing what a playwright does with a given myth is “version.” One determines first if there was a version of the story that predominated, that is, that would seem to have been more frequently told than others. Then one would compare the story as it appears in the play with that version, taking particular note of any differences between the two. A further comparison of these differences with other known versions of the myth would help to determine the degree to which the playwright was selecting and blending elements from two or more traditions. It would also permit one to discuss the ramifications of these changes on the interpretation of the play. One especially asks whether the playwright introduced elements to the story that did not appear in any previously known version of the myth. What might the reasons have been for the innovations in the context of the drama? Do they effect a change in the myth’s focus, toward or away from an action or character, and if so, what is gained dramatically by the change(s)? And in terms of drama’s relationship to the *polis*, is a playwright manipulating a myth in a particular way to make it more relevant to contemporary social or political concerns?

For *Oedipus Tyrannos* earlier versions of the story were considerably different from that of Sophokles, which subsequently became the canonical version. In **Homer** Oedipus marries his mother, Epikaste (not Jokaste), but the gods soon contrive that the truth come out. She commits suicide leaving a curse and future woes on Oedipus. In the lost early epic *The Story of Oedipus* he marries again and fathers the four children familiar to us. Thus traditionally Oedipus' children are not his brothers and sisters, as they are in Sophokles. Homer says nothing of Oedipus' self-blinding, and one early version has him blinded as an act of revenge by servants of Laios. In **Aeschylus'** Theban trilogy of 467 we know that he was dramatizing the curse on the family as it came to fall first on Laios in the first play, then upon Oedipus in the second, and in the third play (*Seven*) coming to rest on Oedipus' two sons. Aeschylus was much concerned with an operative curse, but this is all but invisible in *Oedipus Tyrannos*. Sophokles prefers to concentrate on the figure of Oedipus, his essential innocence of the most horrible of offences, and his own responsibility for the tragedy (1329–33):

It was Apollo, my friends, Apollo, who brought these wretched sufferings of mine to fulfillment, but I did the deed, no-one else.

Sophokles' changes made it not only a more intriguing story for dramatic re-enactment, but also served to invite the audience to see a character familiar to them from myth in a new light. By the time of **Euripides'** *Phoenician Women* (409) Oedipus and Jokaste are still alive and living in Thebes at the time of the Argive assault led by Polyneikes.

Version is an especially important approach in what have come to be called the "Elektra plays," more properly the story of Orestes' revenge, of which we possess a version by all three playwrights (*Libation-Bearers* and the two *Elektra*), as well as the closely related drama, *Orestes*. Both Euripides and Sophokles engage with the seminal version of Aeschylus, and past him with the whole earlier tradition of Greek myth. A reader can usefully compare the settings (both general and local), the identity and role of the chorus, the dramatic personality of the principal characters, the recognition-scenes, the order of the murders, the role of Apollo, and the nature of the aftermath. Euripides, in particular, responds well to the examination of dramatic version. In his *Medea* he horrifies audiences and readers by having Medea murder her own children, and in *Bacchae* has Pentheus conducted alone to the mountain and there torn apart by his mother and her sisters. The extant *Hippolytos* is a particularly significant use of version, since Euripides took the unusual step of rewriting an earlier drama, most likely because he felt he could do something dramatically different with this new version.

This latter use of "version" by the same tragedian can apply also to the comedies and fragments of **Aristophanes** and those of the other comic playwrights. We know from *Wasps* (1037–47) that Aristophanes had staged an earlier version of *Clouds*, which was not well received; ours is a revised version (ca. 419). In *Frogs* Aristophanes borrows from *Officers* by his contemporary **Eupolis**, but creates his own version of Dionysos' training as a rower. But in *Frogs*, rather than being taught to row in the ranks of the Athenian navy's trireme as he was in Eupolis, he is educated in the far more humble craft of rowing the skiff of Charon, ferryman of the dead. The scene is

humorous without knowledge of the earlier play, but its humor is deepened with knowledge of the contrast.

Similarly a knowledge of myth can increase one's appreciation of the humor in a number of scenes in comedy. Comedy did sometimes take myth as its starting point, most notably in the sub-genre of the burlesque of myth (e.g., **Kratinos'** *Odysseus and Company* ~ *Odyssey* 9), but in the extant comedies myth is more generally used to inform individual scenes in a play. For instance, in *Birds* Prometheus appears hiding from Zeus under a parasol and reveals the situation among the gods to humans. Clearly spectators and modern readers are expected to begin from the familiar myth of Prometheus as enemy of Zeus and benefactor of humanity. In Aristophanes' *Wealth* Hermes' arguments for a place in the new world order are predicated on the titles he traditionally possesses in myth. Familiarizing oneself with Greek mythology can thus provide a fuller insight into the humor generated in some Aristophanic scenes.

These three approaches view drama primarily as literature. By the mid twentieth century, while New Criticism was still predominant, newer approaches to Greek drama, especially tragedy, were being embraced. These begin outside the text with theories developed in other disciplines and with the larger cultural context in which Athenian tragedy and comedy were performed.

Interdisciplinary Approaches

As informative and insightful as New Criticism can be, many theories initially developed in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology have been found to apply well to the study of literary texts, especially those of social or cultural anthropology. The text is no longer seen to be a timeless work of art, but rather a cultural artifact and thus a source of information about the society that produced and consumed it. These approaches share a desire to understand more about the producers of the literary artifact by revealing the ways in which the taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of the world are embedded in the language and action of the text. They are interested also in uncovering the range of probable receptions of the drama by the original audience members.

The approach known as *structuralism* is rooted in a branch of anthropology which deals with language systems, that of structural linguistics pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure. But its theory was also influenced by the ideas of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis expounded in Marxist and Hegelian philosophy. The structuralist approach to the Oedipus myths, proposed by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and subsequently taken up by Jean-Pierre Vernant and others, revealed the potential of this approach for an improved and exciting understanding of ancient drama's importance in its historical context. Much of the scholarship on Greek tragedy from the 1970s onward is informed by a structuralist approach. Its premise is that beneath a society's kinship systems, social and political institutions, myths, and especially its language lie particular conceptual patterns and structures of thought based on inter-related sets of binary oppositions. Thus for the three sets of bipolar terms that New Criticism considers as part of the imagery in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, an approach based on

structuralist principles would detect conceptual patterns that extend far beyond their literary usage. The space/state between light and dark is the space/state in which humanity must confine itself, neither wholly in the light (for that is the state of the immortals), nor wholly in the dark (for that is the state of the dead). The terms in each bipolar pair serve to define the boundaries of human existence. But Teiresias becomes the mediating figure between these two extremes, a man who actually lives in darkness, being blind, but who is internally illuminated, having full knowledge of the ways things are because he is the prophet of Apollo, the god of illumination. As most ancient spectators and modern readers would know Teiresias best as the seer summoned from the land of the dead in *Odyssey* 11, he thus participates also in the antithesis of life and death.

In its simplest application structuralism will set about identifying all the terms within a given drama that mark one pole or the other in a binary set of oppositions. It will then attempt to read beneath these sets to discover the "codes" that are governing the language and the action(s) of the play, by looking outside the text to other cultural products for evidence of the same polarities. For scholars working with this form of analysis the codes informing one institution in society will be conceptually related to those governing others. Thus alimentary codes will be consonant with kinship codes, which are consonant with gender codes, which are expressed in legal codes, civic and domestic architecture, the use of space, etc. In both tragedy and comedy, these codes are made particularly visible when they are transgressed, for the transgression often poses a challenge to the status quo, drawing attention to the arbitrary and thus artificial rather than natural distinctions upon which the society operates. The best studies employing this approach will do more than merely identify the binary pairs and the codes they reveal; they will also critically assess how drama generally, or a single play in particular, participates in the representation of society's codes and whether that participation serves to critique or endorse a particular aspect of the system or the entire system.

For *Oedipus Tyrannos* Vernant argues that the original audience would have understood Oedipus' impending expulsion from Thebes through their familiarity with the civic and religious institutions that Athens employed to deal with potential threats to the city's well-being: ostracism for threats to the city's political stability and the *pharmakoi* (scapegoats, expelled at the annual Thargelia festival in honor of Apollo) to remove pollution from their midst and to ensure the god's favor. Many plays respond well to a structuralist reading. However, *Antigone* (life/death, male/female, house/city), *Trachinian Women* (male/female, human/god, human/animal), and *Hippolytos* (city/wilderness, love/chastity mediated by the institution of marriage) have proved to be especially responsive to this approach.

From anthropology also comes an approach which considers the relationship of *myth and ritual* to drama. In its early development theorists working in this area believed that drama originated in the re-enactment of myths associated with the god Dionysos. They understood him to be a representative of the "Year Spirit," whose annual death and resurrection they celebrated. More specifically they identified a pattern in tragedy which suggested to them that the re-enactment of Dionysiac myths *was the ritual* by which the god was honored. This particular formulation of the rela-

tionship between myth, ritual, and drama has long since been abandoned. However, a more nuanced approach has recently been proposed that takes the Athenians' myth of Dionysos' initial arrival, rejection, and subsequent acceptance as its starting point. In this formulation, drama was at first improvised entertainment for the god, commemorating especially the Athenians' release from the god's punishment when they at last welcomed him into their city. Over time it grew into the more formalized and scripted dramas that we now possess. While the first explanation of the origins of drama as ritual enactment of myth is no longer accepted, the interest in better understanding and explaining the relationship among these three continues.

There is no question that both myth and ritual are important aspects of tragic drama. The chorus typically invokes memory of other myths as a way of making sense of the events they are witnessing, and much work has been done on the thematic relationship between the myths they cite and the dramatic situation. In some of our surviving tragedies the establishment of a cult at the end, usually for one of the key figures, permits these plays to be read as a re-enactment of the aetiological myth that underlies a contemporary practice (e.g. *Hippolytos*, *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, *Oedipus at Kolonos*; perhaps *Ajax*). Nevertheless, as such plays are in the minority, it has proved more productive to consider a particular play's use of ritual for dramatic purposes.

Greek tragedy and comedy contain numerous references to religious practices familiar to and performed by its audience members in daily life. To appreciate drama's use of these ritual and ritualized practices, it is first necessary to learn about them in contexts outside of drama. This involves finding out about both religious ritual and ritualized forms of civic behavior that have the force of religious belief behind them, as doing so will provide the grounds upon which to base assessments of their use and possible misuse in both genres. These include petitions for protection (supplication), the reception of strangers (*xenia*, "hospitality"), rites of passage (initiation, birth, marriage and funerary rituals), and the swearing of oaths as well as the more overtly religious practices of blood and bloodless sacrifices, hymns and prayers addressed to the gods, and various forms of divination through which the gods were believed to communicate with mortals.

In every tragedy and comedy, at least one ritual or ritualized activity is used to frame or to carry forward the action. For the original audience who were intimately familiar with these rituals and their significance for the proper maintenance of order within the *polis* the appropriateness or inappropriateness of its use in the play would have been immediately clear. For example, when in Euripides' *Elektra* (783–853) Orestes, as guest, is invited to perform the sacrifice that Aigisthos has prepared as an offering to the Nymphs, there are several ritualized practices involved, each with their individual associations that set up expectations in the minds of the audience and allow them to assess the actions of both Aigisthos and Orestes in this situation. They would recognize, for instance, that Orestes has violated the guest–host relationship by murdering his host; and more than this, he has done so in a highly sacralized context. This is but one example of a recurring theme in Greek tragedy, that of the "corrupted" sacrifice, where murder is presented or justified (e.g., Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*) as a sacrifice desired or endorsed by the gods. Another ritual practice that would resonate

with the audience as deeply ironic in Sophokles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* is Jokaste's prayer accompanied by an incense offering to Apollo. There is nothing amiss in its form but it is being performed by one who is polluted by incest as well as by one who had recently denied the accuracy of the god's prophecies. The audience would realize the folly of the piety shown here (cf. Sophokles' *Elektra* 634–59). Other examples from Sophokles' plays would include the corrupted sacrifice (*Elektra*, *Ajax*), the exploitation of hospitality ritual (*Elektra*, *Philoktetes*), and the manipulation of wedding and funerary ritual (*Antigone*).

Similar observations can be made for comedy, only here the deployment of ritual and ritualized practices generates not the shock of tragedy's perverted ritual but the laughter of the audience in its use for more benign, though still personal ends. For instance, in *Birds* the sacrifice of a small, undernourished goat to sanctify the founding of the new city in the clouds becomes the vehicle for a whole host of jokes and comic business which rely on the knowledge of correct sacrificial practice as well as topical views about diviners (958–90). Eventually, as in tragedy, the actual sacrifice occurs off stage, and its results are reported as auspicious (1118). By studying the way that rituals and ritualized behavior are built into the tragedies and comedies of the dramatists, we gain a fuller understanding of the multiple levels on which these plays communicated with their audiences.

Rituals obviously need agents to perform them and another approach to drama, first introduced in the 1970s by feminist critics, has made a significant contribution to our understanding of fifth-century Athenian society and the representation of women in the various media it produced, including drama. Critical readings of the literary texts in this area draw on the theories and insights from a number of disciplines, including those that we have already considered. This approach is an extension of the work done under the title, *gender studies*. It has its beginning in the challenging of the "naturalist" view of male and female behavior.

The majority of humans are born biologically male or female, a difference manifested in physiologically different reproductive structures, on which are based certain expectations about a child's future sexual orientation. Feminist critics observed that one's biological sex typically influenced the way one is treated, taught to behave, and trained to think about oneself and about those of the same and the other sex. This training produces one's gender(ed) identity, one's masculinity or femininity. Gender studies, until recently, has been dominated by an interest in the representation of women in drama, the way in which their characters are constructed, their attitudes and actions examined, and the way they are employed both to reinforce the status quo and to explore issues important to the identity of the citizen male. The texts of Greek drama have been read to reveal details about the lives of real women in the city, their place in society, the sort of activities in which they engaged. They have also been read as a way to examine male anxieties about women and about themselves, for these dramas also reveal the ways in which a masculine as well as a feminine identity is constructed, gender roles defined, and behaviors stereotyped and naturalized.

We have seen that gender-themes loom large in Aeschylus, not just in his creation of Klytaimnestra, the woman with the "man-plotting heart," but also in his depiction of Aigisthos as a weak and effeminate male. The gender theme in this trilogy goes far

beyond this, however, when at its end the power of women (represented by the Erinyes) is made to acquiesce to male power (Zeus) through the intervention of a female god who is “always for the male.” We have also seen the way in which female characters can be paired in tragedy to establish a contrast between “good” (those who accept social norms and subordination to men) and “bad” (those who do not) women. Euripides likewise created female characters such as Medea, whose otherness as a woman in relation to real men and masculinity is both enhanced by the fact that she is non-Greek and challenged by her adoption of an ideological masculine interest in her own honor and public reputation. Sophokles’ *Trachinian Women* turns on violent relationships between male and female, as the loyal and well-meaning wife Deianeira brings about the death of her overly masculine husband.

Since these dramas were all written by men, performed by men, and watched by an audience that was notionally male, the predominance of strong female characters, especially in tragedy, had formerly been viewed as problematic. Approaching Greek drama with an eye on the representation of gender has led to particularly good insights on the matter. In tragedy we frequently see females left without the oversight of a male and forced by circumstances to involve themselves in activities normally restricted to males. Not infrequently this is because some male has failed to take the appropriate action himself. Disorder in both the public and domestic sphere is inevitably created, suggesting that the proper maintenance of social roles is necessary for the health and stability of both. Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* and *Assembly-Women* operate in this way as well. The term “female intruder” is sometimes used in gender studies to indicate that a female has been represented as invading the space restricted to men. Although women as well as men have a stake in the life of a healthy *polis*, Greek drama does not acknowledge this fact. Rather it was particularly effective at exploiting the imbalance that undermined a *polis*.

Other studies in the area of women’s themes or gender studies focus especially on the issues associated with a male taking on the role of a female, since the actors playing these women were in fact males. This creates problems for a simple equation between “real” women and the female characters of Greek drama. Thus consideration of the “cross-dressing” actor has expanded an approach which was originally (and somewhat derisively) called “women’s studies” into one which invites the participation of those interested in the role and representation of men and masculinity in drama.

As anthropology and sociology were forging fresh understandings of human culture and societies, Sigmund Freud was generating theories for an understanding of the human *psyche* (“mind,” “soul”). His findings have been taken up to form the basis of a *psychological* approach to drama. Freud himself saw myth as early humans’ attempt to articulate what he called “complexes,” problems in the psychic development of the child as he or she matured to adulthood. Freud was particularly concerned with identifying what he believed to be *universal* subconscious desires experienced by every child, but successfully repressed and controlled through the processes of maturation. Deviant behavior, that which was not in accord with societal norms, from phobias to madness and much else in between, was to be understood as the “return of the repressed,” which, according to Freud, was usually sexual in nature. In the myths of Oedipus and those of Elektra, in particular, Freud found models for his complexes

and confirmation of his insights. Additionally, given that the majority of our extant tragedies focus on conflict within a family, they are located in the realm where Freud himself located the psycho-sexual drama of maturation. It is not surprising then that the use of psychoanalytical theory has its attractions and value in the study and interpretation of Greek drama.

While the characters of comedy have not proven nearly so receptive to this approach, some very successful studies of tragic characters have been produced using this method. Certain figures such as Kreousa, Pentheus and Hippolytos have proven to be particularly good subjects. Even the much over-played Oedipus Complex does have its roots in a significant comment by Jokaste (*Oedipus Tyrannos* 980–2):

Do not be afraid about marrying with your mother. Many men have slept with their mothers in their dreams.

More recently Antigone has proved to be equally as receptive to a psychoanalytical reading. However, there is a danger. The characters that populate Greek drama are not living, breathing human beings with pasts and childhood experiences to analyze in order to determine where the processes of psychic maturation went wrong. Additionally, we do not get in Greek drama the sort of character development that we find in the dramas of later periods. The characters of Greek drama do not continually add new pieces of data by which we are invited to construct a whole person; rather initial impressions tend to be reinforced by subsequent words and actions. To apply psychoanalytic theory to the majority of these figures is often to create a hypothetical past based on what the theory would require in order to produce the mental and/or emotional problems evidenced in the drama and to perform the analysis. This creates a rather circular argument.

Nevertheless, there is no question that we do respond to certain characters positively and negatively and this, in itself, becomes an area worthy of study. A more productive application of the insights gained from psychological inquiry would be to ask how and why these less-than-fully-developed characters of Greek drama can affect us so deeply. What is it in the construction of an Antigone or an Oedipus that moves us to respond to them as we do? Freudian theory would suggest that it is because we can take vicarious pleasure in seeing another act out the desires which we ourselves have so carefully repressed. Seeing it done, even as “make-believe,” reduces the internal need to do it ourselves. Moreover, when the outcome of such behavior produces negative consequences for the agent, we are further discouraged from undertaking the action ourselves. In this view of its relationship to psychic responses, drama would seem to provide us with an “eat your cake and have it too” experience. We have the pleasure of consumption without having to personally undergo the losses. But this does not answer the question posed, for it postulates that it is not the character *per se* to which we respond, but the acts they perform.

Perhaps then we should apply psychological insights in a different direction. We might ask what is it about the situations in which these characters are placed that makes their *responses* understandable and believable? On what level or levels do we identify with them? Here, the recent finding from the relatively new field of Cognitive

Sciences may prove to be especially informative. For instance, these studies (called “Theory of Mind” or “ToM”) have shown that from a very early age children can intuit intentionality from the words and actions of others, as well predict what someone is likely to do when told what he or she believes. We apply this skill to characters in drama as we do to people in real life, imbuing them with a thought-life beyond the script. Cognitive studies have also begun to reveal the presence and importance of mirror neurons in our brain, which current knowledge suggests are deeply engaged in, if not responsible for, our understanding of action and intention and our ability to share the emotions and intentions of others and to imitate them. Studies also suggest that these responses occur both when we read a text and when we are spectators to its performance. It thus seems to be an approach deserving further study.

Visual Interpretations

Ancient stagecraft is another approach to Greek drama which deals both with the text as dramatic script and with the text in performance. It was first used to understand how our tragedies, comedies and satyr-dramas were likely to have been staged in the ancient theater of Dionysos at Athens. But it is not quite as easy as it might at first appear. Although there has been much work done on the ancient theaters in Greece, many questions remain unanswered concerning the form and features of the theater where our extant plays would have been performed. All attempts to provide a reconstruction of an ancient play in its original space must therefore remain hypothetical. With that caveat made, there is still a sufficient amount of evidence about certain features of production to permit us to undertake a discussion of the stagecraft involved in ancient drama and to apply that information to a particular play.

Here familiarity with the conventions of the competition is crucial. The “three-actor rule,” the use of masks, and the number of entry-ways into the *orchēstra* will affect any reconstruction of the play. In the division of parts, one will have to consider how much time entrances and exits take, how much time would be required to make a costume change, how an actor would get from exit A to entrance B on time. The answer to the first of these questions would be determined by where the character is in the *orchēstra* when his exit occurs and whether the dialogue indicates a slow or a hasty withdrawal through a particular *eisodos* or through the *skēnē*. Decisions made concerning the positioning of actors in the *orchēstra* may thus be affected by the needs of their next exit. But also affecting blocking (the positions of the actors relative to each other in the space) would be the presence of large objects such as the altar thought to have been located in the center of the *orchēstra* and whether the text demands that a person be at or near this object. A reconstruction of a play will likewise have to take into account the positioning and movement of the chorus as well as how many extras (non-speaking parts) are required by the text and where they will be positioned. This is especially true of a play like Euripides’ *Suppliant Women*, where the playing-area can be quite crowded. Costumes must be considered, the use of small and large stage-properties taken into account, and a decision made as to whether there was a stage, and if so how high it was and how far it projected into the *orchēstra*. Since the theater

at Athens faced south, the crucial area in front of the *skēnē* may have been in shadow as the sun rose higher. This too could have affected blocking decisions.

This may all sound rather mechanical; however, such reconstructions are not devoid of interpretative decision-making. In order to make decisions about staging that are not embedded in the text, and even when dealing with the execution of those that are, one's sense of the relationship of part to whole is invaluable, as is some theoretical understanding of how meaning is produced and conveyed. Things such as power dynamics in spatial relationships must be considered. The symbolism of colors and different types of materials will also be a factor, as will the relationship between gesture, emotion, and vocal inflection. One will have to decide if certain lines were delivered in earnest or with ironic inflection. The aim of all of this is to attempt to come to an understanding of the stagecraft available to the ancient dramatist and how he employed it in conjunction with the spoken word to limit and direct the reception of his play by the audience. As examples of some of the symbolism at work in this ancient space, for *Oedipus Tyrannos* we can consider the possible identification of the spectators with the afflicted citizens of Thebes; the tableau of the three characters, each taking their own road at 1185; and the use of the *eisodoi* at 923, where all expect the summoned herdsman to enter from the local *eisodos* and a totally unexpected character enters by the other. If the main point of the drama is that humans must not make confident assumptions, then this visual symbol reinforces that point.

Many of the same decisions involved in reconstructing the performance of a play in the ancient theater will still be important when reproducing an ancient play in a modern context. Given that we have neither the same type of performance space nor the same cultural norms and language as the ancient playwrights and their audience, how much liberty can we take with the script before it is no longer ancient drama that we are producing? Has the very fact of a script's translation turned it into a different play? How many ancient conventions can we import into a modern theatrical space without confusing or alienating our audience? For example, will a modern audience go along with the three-actor rule and all that it implies? Will they accept an all-male cast or be alienated by the masking convention and male voices for female characters? If it is impossible to recreate the experience of the ancient theater, should we attempt to get as close as possible or abandon the enterprise in favor of making the power of the ancient dramas come alive in a wholly modern context, perhaps even updating the plays to reflect modern concerns? These are but some of the questions that one must entertain to mount a modern production of any ancient play.

If the text itself does not seem to provide enough information about fifth-century stagecraft, where else might we look? One answer has been to undertake *iconographic studies* of drama in the plastic arts, and the obvious place to find such information was in the painted pottery of fifth-century Athens. Unfortunately of the fifth-century Athenian red-figure vases known to us, only a few seem to indicate a relationship with drama in performance. One (fig. 5.1), appears to be displaying the opening scene of Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, where Elektra and her chorus of supporters prepare to pour libations on Agamemnon's tomb while Orestes and Pylades look on from their place of hiding. On the vase the tomb itself bears the name AGAMEMNON, indicating that this is not some everyday scene of mourning, but a specific scene of the



Figure 5.1 Two scenes illustrating the opening scene of Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, on a red-figure skyphos, attributed to the Penelope Painter, 440–430. Reproduced courtesy of the National Museum, Copenhagen (592). TOP: Elektra and an attendant at the tomb of Agamemnon. BOTTOM: Orestes and Pylades.



Figure 5.2 *The “Cleveland Medea,” influenced by the closing scene of Euripides’ Medea, on a Lucanian kalyx-krater, ca. 400. Reproduced courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund (1991.1).*

mourning of Agamemnon. The two men placed on the opposite side of the vase to Elektra and her assistant surely represent Orestes and Pylades hiding from the mourners in Aeschylus’ play. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the image to indicate definitely that it is a representation of an actual dramatic performance. In fact the lack of masks and the heroic nudity of the male figures suggest that at the most we have a scene inspired by Aeschylus’ play. There are, however, several **Attic** vases, mostly from the late fifth century, that show actors getting ready to perform (see, e.g., figs. 1.11; 3.1; cover figure). From these we can gain much valuable information about the nature of the costuming and masking conventions of different dramatic genres.

From southern Italy comes a significant number of vases in a variety of styles with an equally various range of mythological subject matter, some clearly illustrating a myth that we know was dramatized at Athens (see Taplin 2007). But here we face the same problems as with the Attic “*Libation-Bearers*” image. Is their point of reference a particular staging of an Attic drama or are they more simply depictions of scenes from the mythological tradition, colored by a particular dramatic version? One must consider the conventions employed by vase-painters before beginning to assess what the relationship between a tragic text, its performance, and a pictorial image might be.



Figure 5.3 Tableau scene likely influenced by the death scene in Euripides' *Alkestis*, on an Apulian loutrophoros, ca. 340s. Reproduced courtesy of the Antikenmuseum, Basel (S 21).

Take, for instance, the “Cleveland Medea,” the impressive depiction of Medea in her serpent-drawn chariot on a *kalyx-krater* ca. 400 from Lucania (fig. 5.2). How does one determine if a reperformance of Euripides’ disturbing play (431) informs the imagery on this vase? There are obviously similarities to the final scene of Euripides’ play, but certainly points of difference as well. Most significantly the children are not in the chariot with Medea as in Euripides’ play; rather they are strewn across an altar in the lower right-hand corner where they are mourned by an old woman with an old man behind her. Jason himself appears at ground-level, well below Medea, while in the upper corners two large winged figures, probably indicating divine powers, frame Medea and watch the action below. These are clearly not speaking characters in Euripides’ play. Nevertheless, there are aspects of this image which strongly suggest that a viewer familiar with Euripides’ *Medea*, whether from reading the text or from seeing a performance, would recognize this version of the myth in the key elements selected for representation.

Similarly does the “Alkestis Vase” (fig. 5.3), so called from the clearly labeled figure in the center, represent an actual restaging of Euripides’ *Alkestis*, or are the selected elements designed to remind the viewer of the Euripides’ version of the myth? The figures do not appear to be masked, but the columned portico does suggest a dramatic



Figure 5.4 “Orestes at Delphi,” influenced by the opening scenes of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, on an Apulian volute-krater, ca. 390–370. Reproduced courtesy of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples 82270 (H3249).

setting. The central tableau, where Alkestis with her husband beside her embraces two children, certainly reminds one of the scene in the play where they are brought on stage to farewell and then to mourn their mother’s passing (304–434). Our own familiarity with Euripides’ treatment of the myth invites us to read this image as influenced by his play. As both this vase and the volute-krater (“Orestes at Delphi,” fig. 5.4) display a tableau-scene with characters either not in the play (Artemis in the latter) or from another scene (the servant-woman in the former and the Pythia in the latter), we might consider these vases as the ancient equivalent of the modern movie-poster that juxtaposes all sorts of characters and scenes. Particularly intriguing are vases that depict scenes which were not performed in the play, but only narrated, e.g., the messenger-speech at *Medea* 1136–1230 on an Apulian bell-krater of the 350s (Taplin 2007: no. 33). The details accord so well with the account of the messenger that the vase-painter must be depending upon either a reperformance of the play or a close knowledge of Euripides’ text.

Reception Studies

All of the approaches already outlined are to some extent a part of *reception studies*. More properly, however, this category describes approaches which attempt to discover

how these ancient dramas have been adopted, adapted, and used by peoples and cultures outside of Athens and over time. One branch of dramatic reception studies examines the history of the plays in their various translations in a number of languages and the effects these translations have had on subsequent translations and interpretations. An even newer approach studies the history of the interpretations of a particular play and considers how new trends in interpretation are informed by the larger cultural milieu of its own day. Not only is there a "Classical Tradition" but there is an intra-disciplinary tradition in the history of interpretation.

By far the most work to date has been done in the area known as *performance studies*. This relatively new and exciting approach to ancient drama considers the various ways in which the ancient dramatic texts have been appropriated by other cultures, the uses to which different restagings and translations have been put, and especially the reasons behind the tremendous revival of the performance of ancient tragedies in the late twentieth century, a trend which has continued into the twenty-first. Such studies can focus on ancient drama's cultural importance in different countries and in particular periods or it can consider the production history of a particular play across countries and periods. What underlay the drive for "authenticity" in early stagings of tragedy? How has a particular staging of a play been used to support or challenge a social or political policy in a particular place at that particular time? What elements in its production contributed to its supportive or challenging reception? Why have certain plays been more attractive for reperformance than others?

Unlike tragedy, the highly topical nature of Athenian comedy has rendered it far more difficult to stage without adaptation. Nevertheless, apart from the personal names and allusions that it contains, the issues it addresses can be just as relevant to twenty-first-century audiences in many countries as they were to fifth-century Athenians. Yet with the exception of *Lysistrata*, ancient comedy is relatively neglected in comparison with fresh productions of Attic tragedy. Why should this be so? Is it because it is deemed to be less thought-provoking or immediately appealing than tragedy or less open to appropriation as vehicle for the social and political critique of modern culture?

Reception studies generally, and performance studies in particular, require familiarity not only with the plays and with one or more theories and how to work them, but also familiarity with the history and culture of the period in which the performances of interest took place. In other words, they require a good deal of preliminary background study before any analysis can begin. Nevertheless, this a particularly rewarding undertaking, not just for the knowledge personally gained in the process, but also for the understanding of the power and potential that ancient dramatic texts have had and continue to have for addressing critical issues of the present day.

Although each of these approaches has been presented as a separate and distinct way of engaging critically with the literary texts of Greek drama, in practice there is a great deal of overlap, especially among those approaches with their roots in anthropology. Each is in some way dependent upon or employs insights gleaned from alternate methods, but these are then shaped to serve the interpretive frame of each interpreter. All contribute something, great or small, to the appreciation of Greek drama, of ancient Greek culture, and of our own. However, the most important approach to

Greek drama, regardless of the methodology chosen, is the self-aware and self-critical approach. If readers begins from the premise that their own responses to the dramas are inevitably shaped by their own pre-existing belief systems and understandings of how the world works, and that the questions that they bring to the text are, in part, shaped by those understandings and beliefs, they will be less likely to universalize or to project anachronistically modern concerns and attitudes into the texts. The project is always partial, as we can never wholly disengage ourselves from the experiences that shaped us. Nor can we get back to that original performance, experience the play as a member of that first audience, or say with absolute certainty what any particular play “meant” for any individual in that audience. But we can explore possibilities. And we can learn both to appreciate and to evaluate the insights that these various approaches to Greek drama and the culture that produced it afford us as modern readers.

Recommended Reading

Given the broad range of material in this chapter, we have selected a representative title for each interdisciplinary approach. Consult the full list of Further Reading for other relevant examples of the approaches outlined above. For a very useful introduction to some of the theorists whose work has influenced classical studies, see Hitchcock 2008.

Structuralism

- Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: an English translation of two separate books published in French (1972, 1986), this seminal study of the structuralist approach to Greek tragedy contains multiple studies of the societal juxtapositions operative in Greek life and drama.

Myth and ritual

- Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: offers a speculative but intriguing account of the origins of tragedy in a ritual to honor Dionysos’ arrival in Athens. On this basis she goes on demonstrate the highly religious nature of the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides.

Psychoanalytical

- Segal 1982: a stimulating and accessible reading of Pentheus and Dionysos in Euripides’ *Bacchae* through the lens of psychoanalytical theory.

Cognitive sciences

- McConachie 2008: although not focusing on ancient drama, this study offers an excellent introduction to the importance of the cognitive sciences in understanding how characters in drama affect us so deeply and why we enjoy watching performances.

Gender

- Wohl 1998: provides a thought-provoking reading of three tragedies in which women, who began as passive objects in an exchange between men, become active agents whose actions have adverse consequences for these same men.

Iconographic studies

- Taplin 2007: provides an assessment of the relationship of Attic tragedy to the images on 109 fourth-century vases from southern Italy as well as an engaging and informative introductory chapter on general interpretative problems.

Ancient and modern stagecraft

- Goldhill 2007: offers a detailed overview of ancient staging and the six most problematic issues facing modern production as well as offering advice on addressing them.

Reception studies

- Hardwick 2003: provides a concise overview of reception studies in Classics, with a particular focus on its application and aims in relation to Greek drama.

Modern performances

- Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD): <http://apgrd.ox.ac.uk>.
- The Classical Receptions in Drama and Poetry Project, hosted by the Open University: <http://www.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays/index.html>.
- *Classical World* 105.3 (2012), 388–9, contains a list of all recordings of Greek drama available for purchase.

Play Synopses

Aeschylus' *Persians* (*Persae*, *Persai*)

DATE: 472

COMPETITION: Aeschylus won with *Phineus*, *Persians*, *Glaukos of Potniai*, and *Prometheus Fire-Lighter* (satyr-drama).

CHARACTERS: Queen Mother of Persia, Messenger, Ghost of Dareios, Xerxes.

CHORUS: Persian elders.

SETTING: The tomb of Dareios before the Persian royal palace at Susa.

SYNOPSIS: The chorus enter and describe the great army that the Persian king Xerxes, son of Dareios the Great, has led against the Greeks and wonder with some concern how it has fared. The queen mother enters, distressed by a dream and by a waking vision, and asks about this city of Athens which her son is attacking. A messenger reports that Xerxes was tricked into fighting by a deceitful message from the Athenian side, that the Persian fleet has been decisively defeated in a sea-battle at Salamis, and that Xerxes with the remnants of his forces is making his way back to Susa. In grief the chorus and the queen call upon the ghost of the late king Dareios. The specter appears and asks what has befallen Persia. The queen tells Dareios how Xerxes crossed from Asia to Europe, bridging the waters and casting chains into the sea to subjugate the waves. Dareios reveals that Xerxes "has cast his thoughts too high" and has offended the gods by his pride and destruction of their temples. Finally Xerxes enters lamenting the loss of the flower of his army.

ANALYSIS: This is the earliest extant drama that we possess, and certainly its structure and style are less developed than in Aeschylus' later plays. It needs only two actors and no *skēnē*-building, and the chorus takes a particularly prominent role. Three things will interest the student of this play. First, its subject is not taken from traditional myth but from recent history, the battle of Salamis in 480. Aeschylus' predecessor Phrynichus wrote two such historical dramas, his *Phoenician Women* (476) covering the same ground as *Persians*. Second, history is being treated as myth. Xerxes is the familiar tragic hero of Aeschylus who goes too far and offends the gods, and indeed the moral universe of the *Persians* is that of Aeschylean tragedy – "Zeus is the chastener of overboastful minds . . . cease sinning against the gods." Finally the play has much to do with Athens and her pride in her great victory at Salamis in 480. Athens is a city "subject to no individual," the battle is precipitated by a message from the Athenians (from Themistokles who was in a political crisis in 472), and the great victory is told from the point of view of the vanquished. Finally the ghost of Dareios warns Greece and Athens to remember the fate of the Persians and not to "lust after more, squandering your present prosperity."

Aeschylus' *Seven (Seven against Thebes)*

DATE: 467, part of a Theban tetralogy: *Laos*, *Oedipus*, *Seven*, *Sphinx* (satyr-drama).

COMPETITION: Won first prize.

CHARACTERS: Eteokles, Scout, Messenger [Antigone, Ismene, Herald].

CHORUS: Maidens of Thebes.

SETTING: The palace at Thebes.

SYNOPSIS: Ill treated by his sons, Polyneikes and Eteokles, Oedipus has cursed them that they should fight each other over the kingship of Thebes. An Argive army, led by Polyneikes, is now at the gates of Thebes. Eteokles rallies the spirits of his terrified people and leads them in a prayer to the gods. A scout reports that seven leaders command the Argive force, and in the central scene names and describes each to the king. Eteokles assigns an appropriate defender to each gate, finding that he has left for himself the seventh gate and his own brother, Polyneikes. His realization that their father's curse has now come to pass is confirmed by the chorus in an important ode, revealing that this trilogy has depicted the operation of a family curse over three generations. A messenger brings the news that while the enemy has been repelled, the brothers have killed one another in single combat. Their bodies are brought back, and the brothers mourned formally by the chorus. In the received text the dead brothers' sisters (Ismene, Antigone) sing the lament, and this scene is followed by a herald forbidding the burial of Polyneikes and by Antigone's defiant opposition, but this is almost certainly a later addition influenced by Sophokles' *Antigone*.

ANALYSIS: It is difficult to appreciate the entire trilogy from the last play only. Aeschylus was showing the destructive effects of a family curse and in this play we see it worked out on the third generation. Whereas the *Oresteia* operates on the sequence: action → reaction → resolution, this trilogy has no resolution at the end, but only the final working out of an inherited curse on a doomed family. A major difference from the story as told in Sophokles' *Oedipus* is that Laios is given a conditional oracle in Aeschylus: "if he would save his city, have no children," thus turning the story into one of disobedience and punishment. The play is slow-moving, almost archaic in its language and pace and does not immediately appeal to modern audiences. The chorus of women, stereotypically frightened, provides a strong contrast to the male world of arms and violence that engulfs the city. We are made aware that forces larger than humans are at work here: Furies, curses, the justice of the gods, and the inevitability that the two brothers will meet at the same gate. The play is dominated by Eteokles, who is both noble king and cursed son; in good Aeschylean fashion he works his fate out on himself, tragically and ironically by acting as defender of his people.

Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (*Suppliant Women*, *Hiketides*)

DATE: Between 466 and 459, with 463 being the favored date; part of the "Daughters of Danaos tetralogy," the other tragedies being *Egyptians* and *Daughters of Danaos*, and *Amymone* the satyr-drama.

COMPETITION: Won first prize.

CHARACTERS: Danaos, King of Argos (Pelagos), Herald of the Egyptians.

CHORUS(ES): The daughters of Danaos, their cousins the sons of Aegyptus.

SETTING: Argos.

SYNOPSIS: Danaos and his daughters live in Egypt, but are Greeks by descent. He has refused to allow the marriage between his daughters and their cousins, the sons of his brother Aegyptus. Fleeing their home in Egypt, they have arrived at Argos, from which their ancestress Io had come, and claim sanctuary, both as Greeks by race and as suppliant refugees. King Pelagos is faced with a difficult decision: to reject the suppliants, who are protected by Zeus, or accept them and risk conflict with the Egyptians. As he will not make this decision without consulting and gaining the approval of his people, he takes Danaos with him to help plead his case to the assembly. Danaos returns and reports that Pelagos has persuaded his people to protect the suppliants. A threatening herald from the Egyptians arrives and attempts to force the maidens into leaving with him, but Pelagos intervenes to repulse this threat and to place the Danaids under the protection of the city of Argos. Danaos commands his daughters to resist any attractions of desire or love, and the chorus (or part thereof) agree to avoid marriage. A dissenting voice argues that Love is a powerful deity and one that must be respected.

ANALYSIS: Again we have only one play of a trilogy, and here we are not certain whether our play is the first or second of that trilogy. Subsequent events are known: the defeat or death of Pelagos, the forced marriage of the Danaids, the murder of all the Egyptians (save one) by their brides, the trial and acquittal of the one Danaid (Hypermetra) who spared her husband, and the establishment of a new royal dynasty in Argos. The god behind this play is Zeus *Hikesios* (Zeus the god of suppliants), and the theme turns on the rights of refugees and the danger that accepting them will entail. If the date of 463 is correct, the play was written shortly before the crucial events that would lead to the full flowering of Athenian democracy. Thus when Pelagos insists that a ruler cannot decide for the people (*dēmos*), the play may be striking a responsive note in contemporary politics. A final theme is that of gender, since it becomes clear that the chorus is not just fleeing this marriage with their cousins, but marriage in general. They are told that Love is not a god to be avoided, but by whom? A sub-chorus of handmaidens, the other half of a divided chorus, the sons of Aegyptus, or Hypermetra anticipating her coming rebellion? In the final play, *Daughters of Danaos*, Aphrodite herself will defend wedlock by citing the most ancient of human myths, the marriage of Earth and Heaven. We know from other sources that Danaos opposes his daughters' marriages because of an oracle that he will be killed by his son-in-law. This will have been revealed in a later (or earlier) play.

Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

Agamemnon, *Libation-Bearers*, *Eumenides*; *Proteus* (satyr-drama)

DATE: 458

COMPETITION: Won first prize.

ANALYSIS: The trilogy takes the form: action → reaction → resolution, and depends on a definition of *dikē* ("Justice"), by which "the doer shall suffer, that is law." We see in the first play *Agamemnon* come home from Troy to be murdered by his wife, but the chorus have presented the previous events in such a way that we recognize that *Agamemnon* was both the gods' agent in bringing *dikē* on the Trojans for their violation of the moral order and his own actor who willingly sacrificed his daughter and killed many on both sides in the war. At the end of *Agamemnon*, we realize the same about *Klytaimnestra*, that she has punished her husband for her own motives as well and will be so in turn.

The second play keeps us in the same universe, as *Orestes* is directed by *Apollo* to bring justice (*dikē*) for his father's death by killing his mother. *Orestes* admits that he too has his personal motives to carry out this act. The chorus later sings how he was aided in her murder by "Dike, daughter of *Zeus* we call her, breathing destruction on her enemies." In both plays it seems that an end has been put to events, but almost immediately *Orestes* sees the *Furies*, "the bloodhounds of my mother's hate." But in the third play we run into problems, for the gods (at least the male-dominated Olympians) try to stop the wheel from turning one more time. *Apollo* attempts to purify *Orestes* from his guilt, but that does not stop the *Furies*, ancient goddesses of vengeance, from pursuing him. Family vendetta, which will never end, is replaced by civic justice, a court of law whose word will bring matters to an end (*telos*, an important word in this trilogy).

Here another major theme of *Oresteia* emerges, the gender-conflict between males and females of power. We see this in *Agamemnon*, where *Klytaimnestra* ("a man-plotting woman") dominates every character in the play and where women strike back for the violence done to them by men. This conflict seems to be resolved in the ambiguous figure of *Athene*, the goddess who dresses as a male, is a patron of violence, and "is always for the male." She persuades the *Furies* not to devastate *Athens* with their curses, but to make their home there, where they will become the *Eumenides* ("the Kindly Ones"), dispensing fertility and blessing on the people.

Not all accept an optimistic reading of the trilogy, for the *Furies* are persuaded, but with the threat of force, to become part of a new order which is profoundly patriarchal. The gender-conflict is resolved at the expense of the female by *Athene*, a woman of power like *Klytaimnestra* and played by the same actor. Gods appear on stage in *Eumenides*, and *Apollo* comes off poorly – he has told a man to kill his mother, his purification of *Orestes* has not rid him of the *Furies*, and his arguments in the trial are not compelling. *Dikē* ("Justice") in the trilogy is more complicated than an opposition of blood-for-blood vendetta and trial by jury.

But all would agree that this is one of the great works of Western literature. Cosmic in scope and brilliant in execution, *Oresteia* raises great issues, presents memorable characters, and is resolved with great splendor, as the *Furies* don robes of purple and prepare to be escorted by *Athenian* men and women to their new home.

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

CHARACTERS: Watchman, Klytaimestra, Herald, Agamemnon, Cassandra, Aigisthos.

CHORUS: Elders of Argos.

SETTING: The palace at Argos.

SYNOPSIS: On the roof of the palace at Argos a watchman sees a beacon announcing that Troy has fallen to the Greeks. The chorus narrate in flashback the fateful omen that attended the departure of the army ten years before, the dilemma of Agamemnon (sacrifice his daughter or abandon the expedition), and her awful murder at Aulis. Klytaimestra describes how a relay of beacon-fires has brought the news about Troy to Greece. The chorus sings of the wrath of the gods against Troy in language that shifts to suggest their anger at Agamemnon over the war with Troy. A herald announces that Agamemnon will shortly be home, but that Menelaos and his ships have vanished in a storm. As the chorus proclaims that Justice "brings all things to fulfillment," Agamemnon enters with his captive mistress, Cassandra. Klytaimestra persuades him to enter the house walking on a purple carpet, a symbol of the blood that he has shed. Cassandra laments her fate, once virgin servant of Apollo and now a king's concubine. She tells of the murder of Thyestes' children by his brother, Agamemnon's father Atreus, and predicts the death of Agamemnon at Klytaimestra's hands. After Cassandra goes inside, we hear the death cry of Agamemnon. The doors open to reveal Klytaimestra standing over the bodies of her victims, claiming vengeance for the murder of her daughter. Her lover, Aigisthos, Thyestes' only surviving son, enters to join in the triumph, but the chorus insists that this matter is not over.

ANALYSIS: Aeschylus' Klytaimestra dominates this drama. This is a magnificent portrait of a woman with power, a figure who must have terrified the audience and yet earns our grudging respect. The chorus, who has half the lines in this play, creates the moral universe in which "the doer must pay; that is law": this is *Dikē* or Justice. Agamemnon is essentially a minor character, and when he enters his doom has already been sealed by the chorus, who show that he too is guilty of moral offenses and must pay. Much of the power of the play is carried by the patterns of imagery, of which dark/light, hunting and animals (especially the lion, the eagle, the dog, and the snake), and the dripping of liquids (water, tears, blood) recur in various fashions, flickering in and out with subtle shades of meaning. Cassandra stands at the intersection of past, present, and future, looking back to past horrors, and ahead to more. The play turns greatly on gender themes, for we see the harsh treatment of women by men (Iphigeneia, the women of Troy, Cassandra) and the reaction by the female. Klytaimestra dominates all the men in the play, and only Cassandra does not move at her command. Aeschylus was known for the dramatic silence of his characters – in this play Cassandra is visible for nearly 250 lines before breaking violently into song. *Opsis* (the visual component in tragedy) is strong in *Agamemnon*: the arresting scene of the watchman on the roof of the *skēnē*, the purple carpet leading to the central door, Cassandra in a chariot dressed in eastern finery, Klytaimestra standing over the bodies of her victims.

Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers (Choephoroe)*

CHARACTERS: Orestes, Elektra, Klytaimestra, Door-keeper, Nurse, Aigisthos, Attendant, Pylades.

CHORUS: Servant women.

SETTINGS: The tomb of Agamemnon; the palace at Argos.

SYNOPSIS: Orestes, accompanied by his friend Pylades, comes home to Argos from exile and makes an offering at the tomb of his father, Agamemnon. They withdraw as the chorus, led by Elektra, approach. Klytaimestra has had a disturbing dream, and Elektra has been sent by her mother to appease her murdered husband's wrath. Orestes reveals himself and is recognized by his sister. He tells her that Apollo has commanded him to avenge his father by killing his mother. In a grand *kommos*, brother and sister along with the chorus recreate the moral universe of *Agamemnon* ("blood stroke for the stroke of blood") and invoke the spirit of their dead father. In the second half of the play the scene moves to the palace, where Orestes and Pylades gain access by announcing the "death" of Orestes. Klytaimestra sends a nurse to fetch Aigisthos; the chorus instructs the nurse to tell Aigisthos to come alone. He arrives and is promptly killed by Orestes. In a dramatic confrontation Klytaimestra bares her breast and asks Orestes if he really can kill his mother. In his uncertainty he turns to Pylades, who unexpectedly speaks and reminds Orestes of the words of Apollo. After the off-stage murder of Klytaimestra, we see a tableau, reminiscent of the first play, Orestes standing over the bodies of *his* victims. When he sees the Furies ("the bloodhounds of my mother's hate"), he rushes off the scene in a fit of madness.

ANALYSIS: If *Agamemnon* was "action," this play is "reaction," "blood stroke for stroke of blood." Agamemnon and Orestes, played incidentally by the same actor, each finds himself in a dilemma imposed by the gods, each commanded to murder a female member of his family. This is the same moral universe as in *Agamemnon*, where a god can command murder and blood-for-blood vengeance seems to be sanctioned by Zeus. All of this, the chorus sing, was steered by Justice (*Dikē*), the daughter of Zeus. The same powerful imagery pulses through this play (Orestes and Elektra as the "orphaned children of the eagle-father," the blood dripping from the Furies' eyes, the breath of Justice as "fury and death"), and one wonders where this will all end. A crucial opposition is made at line 120, where Elektra wonders if she should pray for a revenge-bringer (*dikēphoros*) or a judge (*dikastēs*), for in the next play revenge will yield to the order of civil justice. If the first part of the play preserves the same expansive pace of *Agamemnon*, the second half moves swiftly in brief scenes, culminating with the confrontation of mother and son, "Stop, my son, respect this breast on which you nursed," "Pylades, what do I do, kill my mother?," and the surprising intervention of Pylades (speaking as the voice of Apollo) which turns this into a three-actor play.

Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (*Furies*)

CHARACTERS: The Pythia (priestess of Apollo), Apollo, Orestes, Ghost of Klytaimestra, Athene.

CHORUS(ES): Furies (ancient goddesses of vengeance); Athenian men and women.

SETTINGS: The temple of Apollo at Delphi; the Acropolis at Athens; the Hill of War (Areopagos) at Athens.

SYNOPSIS: The Pythia arrives at Apollo's temple to find a man with bloody hands (Orestes) inside surrounded by horrible sleeping creatures (Furies). Apollo sends Orestes to Athens to seek judgment there and then drives the Furies out of his shrine, regarding them as no better than animals. Orestes reaches Athens and takes refuge at the statue of Athene, followed by the Furies who surround him with a song of binding. His appeal to Athene is answered by her arrival. Surprisingly, however, she does not reject the Furies but submits Orestes' case to a jury of twelve Athenian men. In the subsequent choral ode we begin to realize that the Furies have some justice on their side ("there are times when fear is good"). Apollo appears to defend Orestes and answer the charges of the Furies, who have the better of the debate. When the jurors' votes are evenly split, Athene breaks the tie in Orestes' favor, because, although female herself, she is "always for the male." Orestes leaves swearing eternal friendship between Argos and Athens, while Athene and her citizens must deal with a chorus of angry Furies, who feel that these younger gods are robbing them of their rights. Athene persuades them to make their home in Athens, as guardians of order and bestowers of fertility. The Furies become Eumenides ("the kindly ones") and a court of law (the Areopagos Council) replaces the vendetta of blood justice.

ANALYSIS: Whereas *Agamemnon* has a slow pace and an archaic feel, this play positively races. By line 240 we are already in Athens, with much behind us and more to come. The structure is bold, two scene-changes and at one point the stage is completely bare. With the twelve Athenian jurors and another sub-chorus of women, the playing area must have been crowded at the end. Where *Agamemnon* was set deep in the mythical past, *Eumenides* bridges past and present and stops just short of present-day Athens. It was a brilliant coup by Aeschylus to make the Furies real and have them appear as the chorus, even more brilliant to identify them with the Eumenides ("the Kindly Ones") and thus alter the structure of the moral universe. The trilogy is also about coming home: Agamemnon comes home to die, Orestes to kill his mother, but in this play Orestes can now go home and the Furies finally find a home, in Athens. Topical Athenian issues lie close to the surface: the controversial treaty between Athens and Argos in 462, the reform of the Areopagos Council (founded in this play by a god) which many regard as the beginning of true democracy, and the prayer of the Furies ("civil war shall not thunder in *our* city"), uttered at a time when Athens was on the brink of internal conflict. Aeschylus does not take sides; this is not propaganda, but brilliant drama, made more compelling by the contemporary background.

Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (*Prometheus Vincitus*, *Prometheus Desmotēs*)

DATE: Unknown; if by Aeschylus, late in his career (460–456).

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Power, Hephaistos, Prometheus, Okeanos, Io, Hermes; Force (silent).

CHORUS: Daughters of Okeanos.

SETTING: A crag in the Caucasus mountains, at the eastern end of the earth.

SYNOPSIS: In the recent war between the Titans and the younger Olympian gods, the Titan Prometheus had sided with Zeus and been largely responsible for the victory of the Olympians. When he learned that Zeus was intending to destroy the human race, he gave them fire, in this play a symbol of all human civilization and technology, and thus saved them from extinction. As punishment Zeus has Hephaistos and Power chain Prometheus to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains at the outermost edge of the world. Prometheus is visited first by the daughters of Okeanos, the god of the sea that surrounds the world, and then by Okeanos himself, to whom he justifies what he has done and foretells (his name means “fore thought”) that even Zeus is subject to Necessity. The play’s only human character Io arrives, the object of Zeus’ affections, who has been changed into a heifer and cruelly driven around the world in fits of madness and pain. Io recounts her past and Prometheus predicts her future: she will end up in Egypt, be healed by Zeus and bear him a son, and her descendant (Herakles) will release Prometheus from his rock. He then tells the chorus that he knows how and by whom Zeus can be overthrown. Hermes, official emissary of the Olympians, arrives to wring this secret from Prometheus, and when Prometheus refuses, he is catapulted into Tartaros by a violent tempest.

ANALYSIS: For the past generation the authorship of this play has been seriously questioned. In some respects it seems to belong in the 430s, too late to be a work by Aeschylus. Features of style and meter, the reduced role of the chorus, matters of staging, and the radically different concept of Zeus have led some scholars to conclude that this might be by another hand, or perhaps an unfinished work completed by Aeschylus’ son Euphorion, who did win the prize in 431. Another play, *The Release of Prometheus*, certainly followed, and a *Prometheus Pyrphoros* (“Fire-Bringer”) has been seen as the first or third play of a trilogy. The most significant feature of the play, apart from the controversy over author and date, is the concept of Zeus, who elsewhere in Aeschylus is the patron and dispenser of *Dikē* (Justice) but here is presented as a rough young ruler, with all the stereotypical arrogance of a newly installed tyrant. Did Zeus “evolve” in the later play(s), or was he simply forced into a deal to release Prometheus in return for the secret? Prometheus and his gift of fire represent great symbols in human existence: practical knowledge, “blind hope,” the desire to progress and succeed against all odds, community and civilization: “all arts (*technai*) that humans have are owed to Prometheus.”

Sophokles' *Ajax* (*Aias*)

DATE: Probably the 440s.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Athene, Odysseus, Ajax, Tekmessa, Messenger, Teukros, Menelaos, Agamemnon; Ajax' son (silent).

CHORUS: Sailors from the ships of Ajax.

SETTING: The tent of Ajax, near the Greek camp at Troy.

SYNOPSIS: Ajax, a traditional hero of action and honor, was second only to Achilles among the Greeks at Troy. When Achilles died, Ajax and Odysseus contended for his armor, which was won by Odysseus. In a fit of rage Ajax attacks the leaders of the Greeks, but Athene tricks him by driving him mad and substituting cattle and sheep, which he slaughters thinking they are his enemies. The chorus and Tekmessa (his concubine) bring him to his senses. When he realizes the truth, he is greatly ashamed and debates his future. He appears to accept her pleas to live with his grief and shame, to submit himself to the gods and the leaders of the Greeks, but after a moving soliloquy falls on his sword. His body is found by Tekmessa and the chorus, who communicate the bad news to Ajax' brother (Teukros). The second half of the play deals with the burial of the hero, since Menelaos and Agamemnon, the leaders of the Greeks and Ajax' great foes, forbid the burial of one who took arms against his own side. In a pair of debates Teukros reminds the Greeks of Ajax' great exploits, and finally Odysseus takes his enemy's side and insists that Ajax be buried with proper honors.

ANALYSIS: Some see the structure of the play as a pair of disjointed halves, since the title character is dead by the mid-point of the action. But the theme is the death and burial of a hero, and as the first actor plays the brothers Ajax and Teukros, a unity in production is provided. As in *Philoktetes*, two sorts of heroism are seen: the traditional hero of strength and honor and a more modern sort, given to thought and words, but in *Ajax* the old is found wanting and the new more sympathetic. Ajax, as well as Teukros and the sons of Atreus, operate on the traditional ethical distinction of helping friends (*philoî*) and harming enemies (*echthroi*) – even at the end Teukros will not allow Odysseus, Ajax' great rival, to participate in the burial. Odysseus, on the other hand, expresses both respect and pity for Ajax (“though he is my enemy, I pity him”) and sees that he could just as easily be in the position of Ajax. There is also an Athenian connection, since Ajax' home, Salamis, was now part of Attica and Ajax himself was one of the ten tribal heroes of Athens. Sophokles had to give Athens a hero whose greatness they could recall with pride, but as so often in Sophokles, greatness attracts disaster. Ajax is a hero out of touch with modern reality, and therein lies his tragedy.

Sophokles' *Antigone*

DATE: Probably 443 or 442, although a case can be made for 438.

COMPETITION: Won first prize.

CHARACTERS: Antigone, Ismene, Kreon, Guard, Haimon, Teiresias, First Messenger, Eurydike, Second Messenger.

CHORUS: Elders of Thebes.

SETTING: The palace at Thebes.

SYNOPSIS: It is the morning after the Argive army has attacked Thebes and been defeated. Oedipus' two sons, Eteokles and Polyneikes, have killed each other, and the new king, Kreon, their uncle, has decreed that Eteokles, who died defending his city, shall be buried with full honors, while the traitor Polyneikes is to be left for the dogs and birds to devour. Antigone fails to persuade her sister Ismene to join her in defying the edict, and leaves to bury her brother's body herself. After Kreon enters and gives the chorus his views on loyalty to the state, a guard announces the mysterious burial of Polyneikes. The guard returns later with Antigone, having caught her giving funeral rites to the body. Antigone confronts her uncle, claiming the priority of the gods' unwritten laws (as opposed to Kreon's "edicts") and the rights of one's *philoí*. Haimon, Kreon's son, enters to plead for Antigone to whom he is betrothed, but Kreon pronounces her death sentence: to be walled up in a cave. In a very moving *kommos* with the chorus, a very subdued Antigone laments her fate "for doing what was right" and is led away to die. The blind prophet, Teiresias, enters to proclaim that Kreon has confused the worlds of the living and the dead and that Thebes is being polluted by the unburied corpse. Kreon departs to bury the body and to release Antigone, but arrives at the cave to find Haimon holding the body of Antigone dead by hanging. Haimon attacks his father and then kills himself. On hearing the news, Kreon's wife Eurydike also hangs herself, leaving a distraught Kreon to realize that he has got it all wrong.

ANALYSIS: One of the greatest of Greek dramas, and yet not easy to appreciate fully. Is this a play about Antigone, or Kreon? Is there one "tragic hero" in this play? In Kreon we seem to have a typical tragic protagonist, who collaborates in his own downfall, but in Antigone we see an innocent who also perishes. Hegel saw the play as dramatizing two "rights," the claim of family and the claim of the state; others see Antigone as right and Kreon as obviously wrong – but Teiresias never says she was right. Is this then a play of two extreme characters who are fated to collide? What would an ancient audience have made of Antigone? We see her today as the sympathetic and lonely martyr, but to the fifth-century male audience was she a dangerous woman meddling in men's affairs and upsetting the order of the *polis*? The play responds well to a structuralist approach, as the opposing sides can be divided neatly into male/female, state/family, logical order/emotion, light/dark, life/death, with even the physical staging playing a role here, the visible palace representing order and civilization and unseen off-stage the world of the dead, where all the characters come and go.

Sophokles' *Trachinian Women* (*Trachiniai*, *Women of Trachis*)

DATE: Unknown; dated as early as 450 or as late as 410; probably late 430s.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Deianeira, Nurse, Hyllos, Messenger, Lichas, Old Man, Herakles; Iole and other captive women (silent).

CHORUS: Women of the city of Trachis.

SETTING: The city of Trachis (in central Greece).

SYNOPSIS: Because of her beauty, Deianeira, now wife of Herakles, had attracted the attention of many suitors, especially the centaur Nessos who abducted her violently. He was killed by Herakles, who then claimed Deianeira as his bride. The dying centaur told Deianeira to dip her robe in his blood; this will create a love charm to regain her husband's love should he ever lose interest in her. Years later she and her children are living as exiles in Trachis because of an act of violence by Herakles. Alone now for over a year, she wonders what has become of Herakles and asks her son Hyllos if he knows anything about his father. News arrives that Herakles has conquered the city of King Eurytas in Euboea, and captives arrive from that sack, including Iole the king's daughter. Deianeira learns from the herald Lichas that Herakles has sacked that city, not because he had been insulted, but because he wanted the king's daughter. In jealous despair, she sends Herakles a robe anointed with blood from the centaur's wound, which turns out not be the love charm she intended, but an incurable poison. When Hyllos brings news of what the robe has done to Herakles, Deianeira kills herself with a sword. Herakles is brought on stage in great pain, cursing his wife and ordering Hyllos to marry Iole and then to light the funeral pyre that will put him out of his agony.

ANALYSIS: Perhaps the most Euripidean of the surviving plays of Sophokles, full of the monstrous and with a cruel god (Eros – Love) behind the action. Beauty and love are seen as irrational forces affecting the lives of men. At the end Hyllos blames the gods for what has happened to Herakles ("There is nothing here that is not Zeus"), and even the prospect of Herakles' traditional apotheosis is left uncertain. There is no guarantee in the drama that the pyre on Mount Oita is Herakles' gateway to godhood. It is more than a little ironic that what destroys Herakles is no monster or armed opponent, but the abandoned wife who is attempting to rekindle his affections, all the more striking since the same actor played both Herakles and Deianeira. Herakles was a frequent character in comedy and satyr-play, but this may be his first appearance in tragedy; if so, he is presented as a bestial and unattractive hero, in perfect company with the monsters he conquers. This play responds well to structuralist criticism, balanced as the setting is between the civilized world and that of the wild and the monstrous, and its characters between order and disorder. Trachis is a city poised between civilized Greece and the wilderness. Gender themes loom large in this play. Deianeira is the polar opposite of Klytaimestra, but achieves the same effect, the destruction of her husband, and her own death-weapon is a sword, not a woman's usual means of suicide.

Sophokles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* (*Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus the King*)

DATE: Before 424 – the plague afflicting Thebes at the start of the play *may* reflect the plague at Athens early in the War (430–425); most scholars argue for 429 or 427–5.

COMPETITION: Finished second to a production by Philokles.

CHARACTERS: Oedipus, Priest, Kreon, Teiresias, Jokaste, Messenger from Corinth, Theban herdsman, Messenger; suppliant children, Antigone, Ismene (silent).

CHORUS: Elders of the city of Thebes.

SETTING: Before the royal palace at Thebes.

SYNOPSIS: Oedipus, the great king of Thebes, has in all ignorance committed the horrible crimes of killing his father (Laios) and marrying his mother (Jokaste). The play opens many years after Oedipus, by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, has saved Thebes and become its king. A plague on fertility has struck Thebes, and Kreon (Jokaste's brother) brings an oracle from Apollo at Delphi that the murderer of Laios must be discovered and driven out. Oedipus pronounces a formal curse on that man. Teiresias enters reluctantly and refuses to help in Oedipus' search for the murderer of Laios. After an angry exchange he declares that Oedipus himself is the guilty party. Oedipus thinks that Kreon and Teiresias are conspiring against him, and Jokaste intervenes as the two quarrel. Her comments about the unreliability of oracles and description of the death of Laios lead Oedipus to suspect that he may indeed have killed Laios, in self-defense at a place where three roads meet. They send for a herdsman who survived that encounter, but in the meantime a messenger from Corinth arrives to announce the death of Oedipus' "father" and in trying to remove his fear concerning his mother reveals that Oedipus was not the son of Polybos and Merope of Corinth. The messenger in fact had received the infant Oedipus from a Theban herdsman, the very same man whom they have summoned concerning the murder of Laios. This herdsman reluctantly reveals that Oedipus was the son of Laios and Jokaste. Jokaste hangs herself and Oedipus blinds himself now that he sees the horrible truth.

ANALYSIS: Aristotle regarded this as one of the greatest of classical tragedies. The theme of knowledge, carried by the imagery of light and dark, dominates and with it a powerful dramatic irony ("I will fight for Laios as if he were my father") underpins this tragedy. The god behind this play is Apollo, god of light and knowledge, whose oracles provide the motivating action for the plot. Sophokles creates a moral universe, not of crime and punishment, but one where an essentially innocent man suffers dreadfully. Oedipus' "guilt" is not one of character – he is essentially a great man – but of intellect: he thinks he knows when he does not. The first syllables of his name may relate to the Greek verb *oida* ("I know"). The very economy of the plot adds to the horror: the same man who received Oedipus as a child is also the survivor of the murder of Laios, and will reveal the dreadful truth in the end. More than one scholar has seen an Athenian dimension to the play: Knox that Oedipus represents Athens, Ewans that he recalls Perikles, and Wiles that "there is no room in a democratic society for such as Oedipus."

Sophokles' *Elektra* (*Electra*)

DATE: A matter of great uncertainty, but 418–410 seems most likely.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Orestes, Paidagogos, Elektra, Chrysothemis, Klytaimestra, Aigisthos; Pylades (silent).

CHORUS: Women of the palace.

SETTING: The palace of Agamemnon at Mycenae.

SYNOPSIS: Orestes returns home to Mycenae accompanied by his faithful tutor (*paidagōgos*), to whom his sister Elektra had entrusted him after their father's murder. Elektra appears and with the chorus laments her own situation, the murder of her father, her relationship with her mother and Aigisthos, and especially Orestes' long absence. Her sister Chrysothemis can live with this situation, but she cannot. Klytaimestra upbraids her daughter for being outside alone and for so constantly going on about her situation. The tutor enters to tell Klytaimestra and Elektra the (false) tale that Orestes has been killed at Delphi. A stricken Elektra vows to take revenge herself. Chrysothemis appears to tell of offerings placed on the tomb of Agamemnon, but Elektra is convinced that these mark the death of Orestes. Finally Orestes enters with an (empty) urn supposedly containing his ashes. Their recognition finally occurs, the token being their father's signet-ring, and while Elektra stands stage centre, Orestes and Pylades enter the palace and kill Klytaimestra. Aigisthos appears to learn more about the "death" of Orestes, but finds only the body of Klytaimestra and his own death awaiting him.

ANALYSIS: One approach will be that of "version," since we possess the dramatic treatments of the same plot by Aeschylus (*Libation-Bearers*) and Euripides (*Elektra*). Sophokles delays the recognition-scene until the very end of the play, reverses the order of the murders, making the death of Aigisthos the climax, and returns the locale to Homer's Mycenae. The relative dates of the two *Elektras* is an intriguing but ultimately unsolvable problem, although it now seems likely that Sophokles' is the later version. Most interesting is the portrayal of the principal characters: the weakest Klytaimestra of the three, an unpleasant and unfeeling Orestes, and an Elektra who keeps herself going with one aim: the return of her brother to wreak revenge. Sophokles seems to be giving us a study of an obsessed heroine, whose one hope is first dashed and then fulfilled. Will this Elektra have anything to live for once the murders are done? There seem to be no Furies in this version, although Elektra herself has behaved like a Fury to her mother, and Apollo is all but invisible as the motivator of the revenge. When props occur on the Greek stage, they are full of significance, none more so perhaps than the empty urn that Orestes carries, supposedly containing his own ashes. The emotional power in this scene is carried by Orestes' refusal to hand over the urn and then the almost facile manner in which he reveals his identity to his sister.

Sophokles' *Philoktetes* (*Philoctetes*)

DATE: 409.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Odysseus, Neoptolemos, Philoktetes, Merchant, Herakles.

CHORUS: Sailors from the ship of Neoptolemos.

SETTING: The deserted island of Lemnos.

SYNOPSIS: The Greeks have been besieging Troy for ten years and discover that they cannot take the city without the aid of Philoktetes and the bow of Herakles. They (especially Odysseus and the sons of Atreus) had left him ten years ago on the deserted island of Lemnos, with an agonizing wound that would not heal. Neoptolemos, the young son of Achilles, and Odysseus are sent to fetch him. The youth would prefer to use force or to persuade Philoktetes, but Odysseus insists that only deception will succeed. Neoptolemos meets Philoktetes and hears how he has heroically prevailed for ten years over loneliness and pain, but still tells his false tale that he is fleeing Troy and agrees to take Philoktetes back to Greece. A merchant enters with a lying story that Odysseus is on his way to Lemnos to fetch Philoktetes. Before they can depart, Philoktetes has a paralyzing attack of pain, and as he passes out, hands the bow to the youth, who promises to keep it until the hero wakes. Neoptolemos keeps his promise, and when Philoktetes revives, tells him the entire truth. Odysseus enters and escorts the youth (with the bow) away, but Neoptolemos returns, hands the bow back, and asks Philoktetes formally to come to Troy. Philoktetes refuses ("it is not the past I fear but the future"), and it seems that Neoptolemos will take him back to Greece. At this point Herakles appears, promising healing for Philoktetes and success for the Greeks.

ANALYSIS: In no other extant Greek play does character count for so much. As in *Ajax*, we see two types of heroism: the traditional code of the man of action and the modern attitude that words are mightier than the sword. Neoptolemos is a young hero coming of age, who must decide where his priorities lie, but the central character is Philoktetes who shows how a true hero triumphs over adversity. To be sure, Sophokles does not make the case clear cut, since many will feel that his final refusal goes too far, that he is as extreme as those whom he detests. The ending promises a less than ideal future, since Neoptolemos is warned to avoid offending the gods when Troy falls, and yet in the traditional myth he will kill Priam at the altar of Zeus. The first and second actors play only one role each, and the third three very similar parts (Odysseus, Merchant, Herakles), and it is with difficulty that we accept Herakles as a true *deus ex machina*, rather than Odysseus' last and final scheme. Dion of Prusa (ca. AD 100) acquaints us with earlier treatments of the story by Aeschylus and Euripides (431) and here we again encounter the issue of "version," for Sophokles makes considerable changes to the myth, including the presence of Neoptolemos on the mission and the fact that Lemnos is a deserted island.

Sophokles' *Oedipus at Kolonos (Colonus)*

DATE: Produced posthumously in 401, written in 407/6.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Oedipus, Antigone, Stranger, Ismene, Theseus, Kreon, Polyneikes, Messenger.

CHORUS: Men of Kolonos.

SETTING: The grove of the Eumenides at Kolonos, a village just outside Athens.

SYNOPSIS: After many years of wandering the blind and accursed Oedipus and his daughter Antigone arrive at Kolonos, near Athens. Upon hearing from a stranger that he has reached the grove of the Eumenides (the Dread Goddesses), he realizes that he has come to the end of his journey. The chorus is at first appalled to learn that this is the cursed Oedipus, but after hearing his plea they agree to let their king (Theseus) decide. Ismene, Antigone's sister, arrives bringing news that an oracle has declared that Oedipus' presence will aid any city that possesses him and that Kreon has been sent to bring him back to Thebes. Theseus enters and grants Oedipus sanctuary in his kingdom. Kreon arrives, having already taken Ismene prisoner and now carries off Antigone, leaving Oedipus alone. The chorus summons aid from Theseus, who rescues Oedipus' daughters and announces that a stranger from Argos wishes to speak with Oedipus. This is Oedipus' estranged son, Polyneikes, who asks his father to help him regain his rightful rule in Thebes, but a furious Oedipus rejects him and curses both his sons. Thunder now echoes through the grove and Oedipus now realizes his time has come. Only Theseus witnesses the final fate of Oedipus, who at last comes to his rest.

ANALYSIS: Sophokles' last play brings the story of the cursed Oedipus to a close. The playwright has added unexpected elements to the story, such as the presence of Ismene and Polyneikes and a blustering and arrogant Kreon. We see Oedipus go from the helpless blind man led by his daughter to the man who strides confidently on his own to meet his destiny. He will become a "hero," a mortal worshipped with honors and sacrifices, and in the course of this play we witness him change from suffering human to something more than man. Heroes in Greek myth are traditionally angry, and in his response to Kreon and then to Polyneikes he begins to assume this status. As with Philoktetes, we wonder whether his anger is too much, as his furious response will doom not only his sons but also Antigone. The play continues the repeated theme of Athens as the place where suppliants and fugitives may find refuge, although in this play Athens is ruled by King Theseus, and is not the democracy it is elsewhere. Kolonos was Sophokles' birthplace, and a magnificent choral ode celebrates the beauty of that place.

Euripides' *Alkestis* (*Alcestis*)

DATE: 438.

COMPETITION: Euripides finished second to Sophokles with *Cretan Women*, *Alkmaion through Psophis*, *Telephos*, and *Alkestis*.

CHARACTERS: Apollo, Thanatos (Death), Serving-woman, Alkestis, Admetos, their son [Eumelos], Herakles, Pheres, Servant; daughter [silent].

CHORUS: Old men of Pherae.

SETTING: Pherae (a city in Thessaly), where Admetos is king.

SYNOPSIS: Apollo had made it possible for Admetos to avoid his death, if he could persuade someone else to die in his place. Only his wife, Alkestis, was agreeable, and the fated day of her death has now arrived. Death arrives to claim his victim, as Apollo leaves the house which he has protected. The dying Alkestis requests a favor of her husband: that he not marry again. He promises not only not to marry but to banish all entertainment and joy from his palace. After her death his friend Herakles arrives, asking for hospitality. Over the objections of the chorus, Admetos welcomes him, keeping secret the death of his wife. After a heated interchange between Admetos and his father Pheres, whom Admetos had expected would die in his place, the funeral procession moves off. A drunken Herakles emerges, but sobers up rapidly when he learns the truth from a servant. Admetos returns from the funeral, realizing that he has made no good bargain in accepting Apollo's favor, that Alkestis in death is happier than he in life. Herakles returns leading a veiled woman, whom he hands over to a reluctant Admetos. She turns out to be Alkestis, rescued by Herakles by wrestling with Death for her life.

ANALYSIS: The principal problem is the nature of the play. It was produced in the fourth position and should therefore be a satyr-drama, but there are no satyrs. Two of the principal themes in the play are *xenia* ("hospitality") and *charis* ("thanks," "debt," "reciprocity"), as characters repay the obligations that they have incurred. These are recurrent themes in satyr-drama. The background is that of European folk-tale, and although we get a carousing Herakles in the manner of satyr-drama or comedy, the tone is at times tragic. How then should the play be treated, as tragedy, comedy, quasi-satyr-drama, Euripidean experiment? Why does Alkestis die for her husband (duty, glory, love)? Does he deserve the happy ending that we seem to get? Admetos had a reputation for virtue in classical Greece. How "virtuous" is he in this play? He promises his dying wife that he will banish all joy and merriment from his palace, and ironically breaks this commitment when Herakles arrives. He makes a good point that he did not wish to add inhospitality to his other woes, but then spoils it by reminding the chorus that he is well treated when he goes to Herakles' home ("and Argos is a thirsty land"). Why does Alkestis not speak at the end? What sort of life will she and Admetos have in the future? These are questions to puzzle the student of this play.

Euripides' *Medea*

DATE: 431.

COMPETITION: Euripides finished third, with his *Medea*, *Philoktetes*, *Diktys*, and *Harvesters* (satyr-drama).

CHARACTERS: Nurse, Tutor, Medea, Kreon, Jason, Aigeus, Messenger; the two sons of Medea and Jason (silent).

CHORUS: Women of Corinth.

SETTING: Jason's house in Corinth.

SYNOPSIS: Medea and Jason have arrived as exiles in Corinth, where Jason has decided to marry the king's (Kreon) daughter. Medea, who has sacrificed her home and her family in her love for Jason, is furious with him and with Kreon. To forestall her anger Kreon announces her immediate banishment from Corinth and that of her two children by Jason. The nurse and tutor worry about her state of mind, but when she appears to meet the chorus, she is marvelously cool and self-possessed. She pleads with Kreon and gains one day to arrange her affairs, has a violent scene with Jason, who tries to argue that he was only acting for the best, and then in a chance encounter with Aigeus (king of Athens) manages to arrange sanctuary with him. Then she announces her plan: to send a poisoned robe to Jason's new bride, and then to kill her children. The children are sent to the palace with the fatal gift, and in a great scene Medea changes and re-changes her mind about killing the boys. Eventually her anger wins over her maternal love. A messenger announces not only the agonizing death of Jason's bride but that of Kreon as well. Medea goes inside to kill her children, whose murder is heard off stage. Jason enters to take his vengeance, but encounters Medea above the *skênē* in the chariot of the Sun, with the bodies of her children.

ANALYSIS: Euripides' most powerful character, with so much against her: being a woman, a foreigner, and a witch. Yet she attracts the sympathy of the chorus and that of the audience for much of the play ("I would rather stand three times in the line of battle than bear one child"). Euripides seems also to have changed the plot in having Medea kill her own children. In previous versions they die either at the hands of the Corinthians or in an attempt by Medea to make them immortal. This development must have horrified the ancient audience as they watched it unfold. Gods are noticeably absent in this play – there is no *deus ex machina* at the end, only a powerful *femina ex machina*. Euripides presents a Medea, who changes from scene to scene (rational with the chorus, fawning to Kreon, furious with Jason, wise woman with Aigeus, mentally divided in her great soliloquy, and vengeful Fury at the end). He has taken the witch of Greek legend, made her into a living, breathing human being for a time, before returning her to the status of demonic creature at the end. The play also explores human psychology and behavior, for while Sokrates said that "no-one does wrong knowingly," Medea declares, "I know that I am about do something wrong, but my anger is stronger than my reason."

Euripides' *Children of Herakles* (*Heraclidae*, *Herakleidae*)

DATE: 430 (?) – vv. 1026–44 *may* refer to the limited Peloponnesian invasion of Attica in 431.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Iolaos, Herald [Kopreus], Demophon, Maiden [Makaria], Alkmene, Servant, Messenger, Eurystheus; children of Herakles, Akamas brother of Demophon (silent).

CHORUS: Men of Marathon.

SETTING: The temple of Zeus at Marathon.

SYNOPSIS: The children of Herakles, led by an aged and decrepit Iolaos (Herakles' companion on his Labors) have taken refuge at the altar of Zeus at Marathon from their pursuer, Eurystheus, king of Argos. A threatening herald ("Kopreus") is driven off by a sympathetic chorus of Marathonians and by Demophon, the young son of Theseus, now king of Athens. Demophon's championing of the suppliants has made a battle with the Argives inevitable, but an oracle predicts that only the sacrifice of a "maiden daughter of a noble father" will guarantee him victory. One of Herakles' daughters (often called "Makaria") offers her life as a sacrifice for victory. A servant brings word to Alkmene (Herakles' aged mother) that her grandson, Hyllos, is coming with an army. In the battle the forces of Athens triumph with ease. Iolaos is miraculously rejuvenated, and even demigods fight on the side of Athens. Eurystheus is captured and his life spared by Demophon. But Alkmene orders his execution and Eurystheus goes nobly to his death, promising to protect Athens from invasion by the descendants of Herakles.

ANALYSIS: The play is generally criticized for loose structure and uninspired writing, and is perhaps missing a scene describing the death of the maiden or another at the end. The ending is unusual as the play veers from a simple opposition of good and evil to a vicious revenge perpetrated by the previous helpless Alkmene and condoned by the Athenian chorus. The drama plays upon two of Euripides' favorite themes, the suppliant-drama with Athens as the champion of the oppressed and the supporter of justice, and the motif of self-sacrifice, where a young person gives their life for a higher and nobler cause (compare Iphigeneia, Menoikeus, Polyxene). If this play belongs ca. 430, then there are strong resonances with contemporary events, since Sparta invaded Attica in 431 (the first year of the Peloponnesian War), and the Spartans claimed to be the ultimate descendants of the children of Herakles whom Athens is shown here as protecting. Iolaos orders the children and their descendants "never to raise an army against this land." Eurystheus begins the play as the persecutor of the children of Herakles and thus enemy of Athens, but by the end he will become a protecting influence on Athens, while maintaining his hatred of Herakles and his descendants. Is Euripides' drama an attempt to reassess a myth in which Athens took pride (Lysias 2.11–16) in the light of current events?

Euripides' *Hippolytos*

DATE: 428.

COMPETITION: Euripides won first prize (other plays unknown). This is his second *Hippolytos*; an earlier version (now lost) was produced in the late 430s.

CHARACTERS: Aphrodite, Hippolytos, Old Man, Nurse, Phaidra, Messenger, Theseus, Second Messenger, Artemis.

CHORUSES: Women of Troizen; companions of Hippolytos.

SETTING: The city of Troizen, across the Saronic Gulf from Athens, where Theseus was raised and where his son, Hippolytos, has grown up.

SYNOPSIS: Hippolytos, son of Theseus and “the Amazon woman,” devotes his life to the service of Artemis, goddess of purity and chastity and of the hunt. To punish the youth, Aphrodite, goddess of sex and passion, has made his step-mother (Phaidra) fall in love with him. Hippolytos has a brief scene with his companions and with an old man, who advises him to respect all gods, including Aphrodite. Phaidra enters, leaning on her aged nurse, who eventually gets her to reveal the problem: Phaidra is in love with her step-son, very much against her will. The nurse, believing that the best remedy is “the man,” informs Hippolytos of Phaidra’s love for him, first swearing him to secrecy. Horrified the youth launches into a tirade against women. Phaidra fears that he will tell his father, and takes her own life, leaving a note accusing the youth of attempted rape. Theseus enters and, upon reading the note, curses his son with death or exile. In a hotly charged scene between father and son, Hippolytos maintains his innocence, but keeps his oath not to reveal Phaidra’s love for him. He leaves, followed by his companions, into exile. A messenger announces that Hippolytos’ horses were frightened by a bull from the sea, and that the youth has been dragged to his impending demise. The dying Hippolytos is brought on stage. The goddess Artemis appears, blames Theseus for killing his son, and promises vengeance on Aphrodite. The goddess leaves, while father and son exchange forgiveness.

ANALYSIS: A brilliant drama, and full of avenues to explore. Why did Euripides rewrite the play? What changes did he make? This is an example of what is called the “Potiphar’s Wife theme,” but is this play not a Potiphar’s Wife story inverted? Can we psychoanalyze Hippolytos as an illegitimate son, with a fear of a sexuality that will destroy him? Is he the marginal outsider who will never complete his rite of passage to adult male? What of the gods, who come off very badly? As often in Euripides, humans have a higher moral standard than the gods themselves – humans forgive at the end, gods cannot. Euripides portrays Love and Chastity as real forces in the universe and in the human personality, but not as the anthropomorphic spiteful gods of traditional myth. We can also read the play in a structuralist manner, noting the opposition of the restricting city and the unrestraining wild, of indiscriminate sexuality and chastity resolved in monogamy. Much of the play is carried by its dominant imagery: beasts and the hunt, water (both fresh and salt), escape and flight.

Euripides' *Andromache*

DATE: Uncertain, but 427–423 will not be far wrong.

COMPETITION: Unknown. The scholiast on line 445 suggests that its first performance may not have been at Athens.

CHARACTERS: Andromache, Serving-woman, Hermione, Menelaos, son of Neoptolemos and Andromache (Molossos), Peleus, Nurse, Orestes, Messenger, Thetis.

CHORUS: Women of the palace.

SETTING: The palace at Phthia.

SYNOPSIS: Andromache, the widow of Hektor, the great defender of the Trojans, has been given as a victory-prize to Neoptolemos, whose father Achilles killed Hektor. Now in Neoptolemos' home in Phthia as his unwilling mistress, she has borne him a son (Molossos), while his actual wife, Hermione, remains childless. While Neoptolemos is away in Delphi, Hermione and her father Menelaos plot to kill Andromache and her child. Andromache is enticed from sanctuary at the altar of Thetis, the sea-goddess who was Achilles' mother, and is about to be slain by Menelaos, when Peleus, Achilles' aged father, intervenes in the nick of time. Now it is Hermione's turn to be threatened, as her husband is still absent and her father has deserted her. She too is rescued, by Orestes to whom she was engaged before her marriage to the son of Achilles. They flee together. Word comes to Peleus that his grandson, Neoptolemos, has been murdered at Delphi by Orestes and a band of thugs. It is his turn to despair, but is consoled by the epiphany of Thetis, his goddess wife, who foretells the destiny of Andromache and her son and their own re-union as husband and wife.

ANALYSIS: The play clearly falls into three movements, each depicting despair and rescue, and the title character, Andromache, is present only for the first movement. How much unity is there and do we then brand the play as "episodic"? There are some uniting themes: rescue, domestic disharmony, the absent Neoptolemos (whom some see as the main character), a repetition of despair followed by rescue and relief. Menelaos, Hermione, and Orestes form a nasty trio of Spartan characters in contrast to the true heroism of the Trojans and the Phthians, and some find the play's strong anti-Spartan sentiments appropriate to the background of the early years of the war. But these also contribute to the larger theme of heroism in this drama. The role of the gods has been questioned, for while Thetis may be that rare creature, a benevolent Euripidean god, Apollo has sanctioned the murder of Neoptolemos in his own shrine. Finally, Euripides expresses his familiar theme of the horror and futility of war, as the chorus sing of the plague "that has dripped bloody thunder" on both Greeks and Trojans alike.

Euripides' *Hecuba* (*Hekabē*)

DATE: Mid 420s.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Ghost of Polydoros, Hecuba, Polyxene, Odysseus, Talthybios, Serving-woman, Agamemnon, Polymestor; two sons of Polymestor (silent).

CHORUS: Captive women of Troy.

SETTING: A region of Thrace opposite Troy.

SYNOPSIS: Troy has fallen to the Greeks, Hecuba and the other captured women have started their journey to Greece and paused in the land of Thrace, where Polymestor rules. Polydoros, Hecuba's youngest son, had been sent there for safety but was murdered by Polymestor as soon as he heard of Troy's fall. Polydoros' ghost speaks the prologue. The chorus informs Hecuba that the Greeks are debating whether to sacrifice her daughter Polyxene as an offering to the dead Achilles. Odysseus and Hecuba debate the fate of her daughter, Polyxene entering to say that she will die gladly rather than endure the life of a slave. Talthybios, the herald of the Greeks, describes how she died nobly, and Hecuba asks that she be allowed to give Polyxene a proper burial. A servant woman brings in the body of Polydoros which they have found floating in the sea, and Hecuba's grief is now doubled. She asks Agamemnon to allow her to take revenge on Polymestor. Polymestor and his two sons are enticed into the women's tent, where he is blinded and his sons murdered. Agamemnon judges a final debate between Polymestor and Hecuba and finds for Hecuba. Polymestor predicts the imminent demise of Hecuba as Odysseus' ship returns to Greece.

ANALYSIS: A play that leaves an unpleasant taste, *Hecuba* is a product of the war, a time when moral values were in question. Some find the plot a clumsy pairing of two episodes, each dealing with the death of a child of Hecuba, but it is held together by the dominant motif of *peithō* ("persuasion"). Hecuba takes part in three debates, the first for the life of her daughter (which she loses), the second with Agamemnon over revenge (the decision of which is moot), and the third with Polymestor over the revenge she has taken (which she wins). It is more than a little ironic that her one "victory" is to justify murder and blinding. The victorious Greeks come off unfavorably compared with the captive Trojans, and their modern pragmatic ethics use loyalty and self-interest to justify the murder of Polyxene and their lack of action against Polymestor. Odysseus puts it well in his debate with Hecuba ("live with it!"). On the personal level we see a study of a tortured woman who eventually succumbs to vengeance and is little short of the madness predicted by Polymestor at the end of the play.

Euripides' *Suppliant Women* (*Suppliants*, *Hiketides*)

DATE: Usually dated to 424–420.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Aithra, Theseus, Adrastos, Theban herald, Messenger, Euadne, Iphis, Athene; attendants to the mothers, Athenian herald (silent).

CHORUSES: Mothers of the “Seven against Thebes”; the sons of the Seven.

SETTING: The precinct of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis near Athens.

SYNOPSIS: Not just the body of Polyneikes, but those of the Argive invaders, lie unburied on the field before Thebes. The mothers of the dead are led by Adrastos, king of Argos and leader of the ill-fated expedition, to the shrine of the Mother and Daughter at Eleusis to seek Theseus' aid in recovering the bodies for burial. They are met by Theseus' mother Aithra and then by Theseus himself. Initially Theseus rejects their request, on the grounds that Adrastos has engaged in a war of aggression against Thebes, but he is persuaded by his mother, who has taken pity on her fellow-women in distress. A herald arrives from Thebes, and after a debate about contemporary politics (monarchy v. democracy), warns Theseus not to intervene. Theseus leads the Athenian army off to Thebes. A messenger reports the Athenian victory and the recovery of the bodies, but it has been a bloody and costly fight. The bodies of five of the Seven are brought back and Adrastos delivers a eulogy, in which these traditional villains are portrayed as brave citizens and loving family men. Euadne, the wife of Kapaneus, traditionally the most vicious of the lot, cannot live without her husband and leaps upon his funeral pyre, as her horrified father (Iphis) watches. The play ends with Adrastos thanking Theseus and promising Argive friendship with Athens, and the goddess Athene appearing to encourage the sons of the dead to further war with Thebes.

ANALYSIS: This tragedy has much in common with *Children of Herakles*, but here the world is grey, not black-and-white. The suppliants are not totally in the right, nor the Theban adversary totally in the wrong. Adrastos has engaged in an unjust war, the herald makes telling points against democracy, the battle is not a walk-over with the gods helping, the Seven are not evil monsters but decent citizens and family-men, Athene appears to demand a treaty between Argos and Athens “in writing” and to promise even more war. The Athenians took great pride in this intervention on the side of international justice, but Euripides does what he can to dramatize this incident in shades of grey. In the early 410s Athens and Argos would strike a military alliance – this may provide some background to the play. In 424 Athenian dead after the battle against the Thebans at Delion lay unburied; this would have cast long shadows on a tragedy about Thebes and burial of bodies in the late 420s. At one point Theseus is described as “general” rather than “king,” as if he were a figure of Athenian political system of the 420s.

Euripides' *Elektra* (*Electra*)

DATE: Often dated to 413, but the metrical evidence suggests 420 or 419.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Farmer, Elektra, Orestes, Old Man, Messenger, Klytaimestra, Castor; Pylades, Pollux (silent).

CHORUS: Local countrywomen.

SETTING: A farm cottage in the Argive countryside.

SYNOPSIS: After the murder of her father, Elektra has been “married” to a farmer, who has not consummated the marriage, and they now live in a cottage in the farthest reaches of Argos. Orestes and Pylades enter cautiously to spy out the territory – Apollo has told him to return with stealth and kill his mother. Pretending to be a messenger from her brother, Orestes is welcomed by Elektra and the farmer, who sends for an old man who knew Orestes as a boy. This old man effects the recognition of a rather hesitant Orestes in a parody of the recognition scene in Aeschylus. The old man and Elektra plot how to get Aigisthos and Klytaimestra out of the palace and accomplish their murders. A messenger reports that Orestes and Pylades killed Aigisthos as he was offering a sacrifice and invited them to join his feast. Orestes returns with the body of Aigisthos, and with Elektra sees his mother approaching. He expresses his doubts about an oracle that has commanded matricide, but Elektra has none. A bitter confrontation between mother and daughter leads to Klytaimestra’s entry into the cottage, where she is killed by Orestes and Elektra. Brother and sister emerge, stricken with guilt and remorse. The Dioskouroi (Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus and brothers of Klytaimestra) appear to declare that Apollo’s oracle “was not a wise one” and to announce the future fate of the participants.

ANALYSIS: This play is one of the best instances of version and intertextuality, since it depends on and responds to Aeschylus’ earlier *Oresteia*. The setting is the countryside, not the palace; the plan is not how to gain access, but how to lure their victims out; the recognition-scene, whose authenticity has been questioned by some, all but laughs at that in *Libation-Bearers*. What sort of man (or woman) could kill their mother? Not a hero as in Aeschylus, but only a flawed and mentally unstable anti-hero. Elektra suffers from a self-imposed martyrdom, Orestes is a coward who really doesn’t want to be there, a hospitable Aigisthos is murdered at a religious occasion, and this Klytaimestra is almost sympathetic (“perhaps I was too hard on my husband,” “I know you, my daughter, and forgive you”). The only positive character in the play is the farmer, Elektra’s “husband,,” about whom Orestes ironically remarks that external appearances seem not to reflect a person’s true worth. Apollo’s oracle is explicitly describes as “not wise” by a demigod, and when Orestes says in the debate with his sister, “I will not believe that oracle was right,” he will be proved correct. Whether this play is later or earlier (more likely) than Sophokles’ *Elektra* remains one of the great mysteries of the study of Greek drama.

Euripides' *Herakles* (*Hercules Furens*, *The Madness of Herakles*)

DATE: 416 or 414.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Amphytrion, Megara, Lykos, Herakles, Iris, Lyssa (Madness), Messenger, Theseus; sons of Herakles (silent).

CHORUS: Elders of Thebes.

SETTING: The palace at Thebes.

SYNOPSIS: Herakles has married Megara, the daughter of the king of Thebes, and is now absent on his famous Labors. Meanwhile a usurper, Lykos ("Wolf") has seized power in Thebes and is planning to kill Megara and her children. Megara asks for time to prepare herself and her children, and as she and Amphytrion (Herakles' step-father) pray for aid from Zeus, Herakles returns, having completed the last of his Labors. When Lykos returns to take Megara in to her death, he is murdered off-stage by Herakles. All seems to have ended happily, but on the palace roof appear Iris (messenger of the gods) and Lyssa (Madness), sent by Hera to continue her wrath against Herakles. Lyssa is unwilling to attack Herakles who has been a defender of the gods, but does her work at the insistence of Iris. A messenger describes how Herakles killed his family in a fit of madness. We see a tableau of Herakles amid the bodies of his wife and sons, and with the aid of Amphytrion he returns to sanity and the ghastly realization of what he has done. His friend Theseus, whom he had rescued from the underworld, arrives with the purpose of intervening at Thebes, but takes the grief-stricken hero to Athens.

ANALYSIS: Euripides has made major changes to the traditional plot-line: the placing of the Labors before the murder of his family, the reason for the Labors (to atone for his step-father's guilt), replacing four of the traditional Labors with feats that stress Herakles' protection of humanity, and the entry of Theseus and Athens into the story. The greatest change is in the character of Herakles, who is not the crude and gluttonous figure from comedy nor the brute from *Trachinian Women*, but a suffering servant, who has protected humanity and served the gods. Gods loom large over this play, not just the appearance of Iris and Lyssa and the wrath of Hera, but the acquiescence of Zeus and Herakles' insistence that the unflattering stories about the gods are "the wretched tales of poets – a god, if truly god, needs nothing." There is no hint of an apotheosis in Herakles – given what we see of the gods, would Herakles want to be one? Theseus does promise that Herakles will be honored after his death with sacrifices, but this may just mean that he will become a *hērōs* and not a god. As so often in Euripides, mortal views about deity are higher than the reality. The play has been criticized for falling into two distinct episodes, but it is linked by the theme of friendship, something that only humans can appreciate, and by the heroism and humanity of its title character. This is one of Euripides' most innovative and powerful dramas.

Euripides' *Trojan Women* (*Troades*)

DATE: 415.

COMPETITION: Euripides finished second to Xenokles, with his *Alexandros*, *Palamedes*, *Trojan Women*, and *Sisyphos* (satyr-drama).

CHARACTERS: Poseidon, Athene, Hecuba, Talthybios, Cassandra, Andromache, Menelaos, Helen; Astyanax (silent).

CHORUS: Women of Troy.

SETTING: The city of Troy.

SYNOPSIS: Troy has fallen after a ten-year war. The sea-god Poseidon, who favored the Trojans, says farewell to his ruined city. Athene, the great supporter of the Greeks, offended by the ill-treatment of her temple by one of the Greeks, asks Poseidon's aid in wreaking vengeance on the Greeks during their return. Hecuba and the chorus lament their fate, and wonder what will befall them. Talthybios, a herald from the Greeks, announces that they have been allotted each to separate masters, the virgin Cassandra to Agamemnon, Andromache to the son of Achilles, and Hecuba to Odysseus ("the worst lot of all"). Cassandra in the grip of prophetic madness is taken forcibly to her master in a parody of marriage. Next Hektor's despairing widow, Andromache, enters with her young son (Astyanax). Hecuba persuades her to live for her son, who may one day rebuild Troy – Talthybios re-enters to announce that the boy must die. Menelaos arrives to take vengeance on his wife Helen for causing the whole war. Hecuba and Helen debate the latter's responsibility, with Menelaos declaring in favor of Hecuba but postponing his revenge until they reach Greece. Finally the body of Astyanax is brought in for whatever burial they can provide. Hecuba and the women leave as the walls of Troy are brought down in flames.

ANALYSIS: All three tragedies of 415 are set at Troy within the context of the Trojan War. Did Euripides then write a loose "Trojan trilogy" in 415? If so, were there connecting characters and themes? Do contemporary events provide a background – the Athenian massacre of the Melians in 416/15, and the preparations for the great Armada of 415 that will leave on an aggressive overseas campaign to Sicily? The two gods who speak the prologue are in fact the two national gods of Athens. "Victors write the history books," but this story is told from the point of view of defeated foreign women. On several occasions in the play Euripides suggests that the traditional story-line may not take place (Astyanax is usually killed on the night Troy falls, Helen may die at her husband's hand). Is there any unity in a play that seems to be a series of bleak and hopeless episodes? There is a natural rise and fall in each of the four episodes (the women's hopes raised, then dashed by the entry of a male from the Greek army), and by the end Hecuba and the chorus realize what we know from the start, that the gods exist and they don't care.

Euripides' *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* (*Iphigeneia in Tauris*)

DATE: 414–411.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Iphigeneia, Pylades, Orestes, Herdsman, Thoas, Messenger, Athene.

CHORUS: Captive Greek women.

SETTING: The temple of Artemis among the Taurians (in what is today the Crimea).

SYNOPSIS: In the prologue Iphigeneia tells us that she did not die at Aulis, but was rescued by Artemis to serve at her temple among the Taurians. Here she prepares for sacrifice any Greek males who land on that shore. Not all the Furies have left Orestes, and to rid himself finally of them he and Pylades have been sent by Apollo on another mission: to bring back to Greece the statue of Artemis from the Taurians. A messenger tells Iphigeneia that two Greeks (one named Pylades) have been captured on the shore. Orestes and Pylades are brought before her to be prepared for sacrifice, but in a clever recognition-scene brother and sister learn each other's identity and together they plan the theft of the statue and their escape to Greece. Iphigeneia informs Thoas, the local ruler, that one of these Greeks has polluted the statue of Artemis by touching it with hands stained with a mother's blood, and that it must be cleansed by washing in the sea. A messenger tells Thoas that the Greek was really Iphigeneia's brother and that their ship is attempting to escape. Athene appears to prevent the pursuit, predicts the future for Iphigeneia, and finally resolves the conflict over Troy.

ANALYSIS: While Euripides did not invent the story that Iphigeneia survived the sacrifice at Aulis, he is clearly writing a sequel to *Oresteia*, in which not all the Furies acquiesce in the verdict and Orestes must go on yet another mission for Apollo. The play makes a nice pair with his earlier *Elektra*, for where Elektra is bitter and spiteful, Iphigeneia rises above her fortunes and remains loyal to her family and to Greece, and where *Elektra* ends on an unpleasant note, *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* ends with "Orestes sailing home on a calm sea." With *Ion* and *Helen*, it belongs to the sub-genre described by as "Romantic Tragedy" (Conacher) or "Escape Tragedy" (Wright). The principal themes include the motif of sacrifice (Iphigeneia has gone from one altar of blood to another) and that of illusion. Orestes wrongly thinks that his sister died at Aulis, while Iphigeneia has had a dream which she interprets (wrongly) as meaning that her brother Orestes is dead. This leads to the questioning of oracles and to Apollo's role in the story ("Phoebus the prophet lied to us"), although the critique of the gods is not as severe as in other plays. A brother-sister doublet operates neatly in that as Orestes brings his sister back to Greece, Apollo arranges that his sister (Artemis, or at least her statue) is returned as well. Greek notions of ethnic superiority are punctured by Thoas' reaction to the news that one of the captives has killed his mother, "no barbarian could do that."

Euripides' *Ion*

DATE: Late 410s – 412 is often suggested.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Hermes, Ion, Kreousa, Xouthos, Old Man, Servant, the Pythia, Athene.

CHORUS: Athenian servant-women.

SETTING: The temple of Apollo at Delphi.

SYNOPSIS: Kreousa, daughter of the king of Athens, was raped by Apollo and had a child by him. She exposed the infant, which was rescued by Hermes and taken to Delphi, where the boy has grown up as the temple servant of Apollo. Kreousa is now married to a foreigner (Xouthos), but they are still childless. They journey to Delphi to consult the god, and the first person she meets is the boy, her son by Apollo, but neither is aware of the other's identity. Xouthos, a gruff no-nonsense type, arrives, consults the oracle, and is told that the first person he meets "going out" (Greek – *ion*) of the temple is his son. This, of course, is the boy, now appropriately named "Ion." Kreousa finds out from an old serving-man that her husband has been given a son by Apollo. She sings a powerful song of grief and accusation, recounting her rape at Apollo's hands, and then with the old man plots to kill Ion. A messenger announces that Ion escaped the poison meant for him, that the old man was captured, and that Ion is on his way to take vengeance on Kreousa. She takes refuge at the altar of Apollo, and is rescued by the priestess of Apollo (the Pythia), who shows Ion the clothes and jewelry found with him as an infant. Kreousa recognizes these as her own, and realizes that Ion must be her son. Before Ion can ask the oracle about the false prophecy to Xouthos, Athene appears to straighten out the last wrinkles in the plot and to predict a glorious future for Ion as king of Athens.

ANALYSIS: *Ion* is an example of tragedy with a happy ending, where the catastrophe is not realized but averted. The play is not without touches of humor: Hermes retreating to watch from the shrubbery, Kreousa relating her misfortunes as those of "a friend," the gruff Xouthos embracing the innocent boy who misunderstands his approaches. Can a tragedy end happily? Are there hints of a more serious theme? Kreousa and her serving-women actually believe that her grandfather sprang from the earth itself, and in this play Athenian ethnic purity leads to attempted murder. The gods fare badly in this tragedy: the plot does not proceed as Hermes had predicted in the prologue, Apollo gives a false oracle to Xouthos, and then Athene has to show up to "cover" for her brother. But not all agree with such an ironic reading of *Ion*. Many see Apollo's handling of the action as essentially benevolent, and on one level the play does provide patriotic propaganda – Ionians (who include Athenians) are descended from a god (Apollo), while other Greeks have only human forebears. On the whole, however, the broad strokes of comedy do not completely cover the darker side of this fine play.

Euripides' *Helen*

DATE: 412.

COMPETITION: Result unknown – produced with *Andromeda*, and perhaps *Ion*.

CHARACTERS: Helen, Teukros, Menelaos, Old Woman, Messenger, Theonoe, Theoklymenos, Second Messenger, Servant, the Dioskouroi.

CHORUS: Captive Greek women.

SETTING: The royal palace in Egypt.

SYNOPSIS: The play follows the line of Stesichoros' *Palinode*, that Helen never went to Troy. A phantom was substituted in her place, while the real Helen was spirited off to Egypt, where a lustful king (Theoklymenos) has been eyeing her. The war is now over, Troy has fallen, and a Greek from the war (Teukros) meets Helen in Egypt, hears her story, and tells her that she is universally hated for her part in the conflict. Menelaos arrives, shipwrecked along with "Helen" on the coast of Egypt, and sees this woman "who looks just like Helen." Eventually he is convinced of her story and husband and wife are joyfully reunited. But how to flee Egypt? Helen and Menelaos persuade the king's wise sister, Theone, not to reveal Menelaos' presence, and after her consent devise a plan of escape. Helen tells the king that she has just learned that her husband, Menelaos, has died in a shipwreck on the coast of Egypt, and requests a ship for a symbolic burial at sea. Menelaos and his sailors seize the ship and sail off into the sunset, while Helen's brothers, the Dioskouroi, forbid the Egyptian king to interfere.

ANALYSIS: Is this "tragedy"? Tragedy can have a happy ending, but here Euripides seems to cross the line into comedy. Like *Ion* and *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* this play belongs to what has been called "Romantic Tragedy" (Conacher) or "Escape Tragedy" (Wright). But unlike these plays where characters are in actual danger, there is little potential for tragedy here. Another matter of note is the change in Helen, from object of loathing (as so often in tragedy) to sympathetic heroine. What Euripides has done, it seems, is to change Helen into Penelope, waiting patiently and chastely for her husband to rescue her. A more serious theme is that of reality and illusion, for things in this case are not what they seem or what people think – the Helen for whom the Greeks fought at Troy is an illusion fashioned out of air, prompting the messenger to exclaim, "we fought for ten years – for nothing?," and when they meet the real Helen refuse to believe their eyes. Theone is certainly Euripides' creation and it lies with her whether Helen and Menelaos will return to Greece; in deciding she will choose the plan of one goddess (Hera) over that of another (Aphrodite). Her mysterious comment that "the mind of the dead may not have life, but falling into the deathless *aithēr* it has deathless understanding" may reflect contemporary speculation on life after death.

Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (*Phoinissai*)

DATE: 411–408.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Jokaste, Antigone, Tutor, Polyneikes, Eteokles, Kreon, Menoikeus, Teiresias, Messenger, second Messenger, Oedipus; Teiresias' daughter (silent).

CHORUS: Phoenician women on their way to Delphi.

SETTING: Thebes, at the time of the attack by the Seven.

SYNOPSIS: Both Jokaste and Oedipus are still alive and living in Thebes. Oedipus' sons have put their father away, but his curse haunts them still, that they will share their inheritance with the sword. Eteokles has failed to yield power to his brother Polyneikes after a year's rule, as they had agreed, and the latter has arrived at the head of a vast army from Argos to besiege his own city. Jokaste has brokered a truce and attempts to reconcile her two sons but fails. Kreon and Eteokles, acting on information taken from an Argive prisoner, plan the defense of Thebes. Kreon and his son Menoikeus encounter Teiresias, who tells Kreon that only the sacrifice of the young Menoikeus will save Thebes. Kreon immediately plans to send his son away, but Menoikeus goes off to throw himself willingly from the walls of Thebes and thus save his city. A messenger brings news to Jokaste that all the enemy leaders at the seven gates have been defeated and that the brothers are preparing to decide the issue in mortal combat. A second messenger reports not only that the brothers have killed each other but also that Jokaste has committed suicide over their bodies. Antigone sings a monody of lament over the bodies of her brothers, and finally the aged and blind Oedipus appears and is sent into exile by the new ruler, Kreon.

ANALYSIS: The play was one of the most popular of Euripides' dramas in antiquity, due in part to Euripides' bold additions to the story: the survival of Jokaste and Oedipus, Eteokles as the power-hungry brother, the sub-plot of Kreon and Menoikeus, the suicide of Jokaste. Study of the play is complicated by the intrusion of later material into the text, especially at the end, where themes from Sophokles' *Oedipus* and *Antigone* intervene to make the original ending unclear. The second half of the prologue where Antigone and her tutor view the Argive army has also been suspected of being a later addition. What we do have is a dramatically effective presentation of a cursed family, with all the conflicts and loyalty that *philia* may engender. Eteokles is wrong to have kept the kingship, Polyneikes to have attacked his own city with a foreign army, but Jokaste still loves them both. Menoikeus by his self-sacrifice shows how one man *can* save the larger community. The tragedy also displays a brilliant mingling of the images of human and the monstrous (the dragon, the Sphinx).

Euripides' *Orestes*

DATE: 408.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Elektra, Helen, Hermione, Orestes, Menelaos, Tyndareus, Pylades, Messenger, Phrygian slave, Apollo.

CHORUS: Women of Argos.

SETTING: The palace at Argos.

SYNOPSIS: The Argives are planning to put Orestes and Elektra on trial for killing their mother; the penalty will be death. Their one hope is that Menelaos, who has just arrived with Helen, will intervene on their behalf. Elektra has been caring for her sleeping brother, driven mad by his murder of his mother, but he awakes and suffers an attack of the Furies. Menelaos enters and is aghast at his nephew's condition and promises help, but Tyndareus, Orestes' grandfather, appears and, furious with Orestes, plans to speak for his execution. Menelaos decides not to intervene, leaving Orestes without hope. Pylades returns to Argos and rouses Orestes to make a defense to the assembly. A messenger reports to Elektra that the assembly has decreed that they must die. Orestes, Elektra, and Pylades plan to kill Helen before they die, and then decide to take Menelaos' daughter Hermione hostage. Thus they may be able to escape. Orestes and Pylades enter the palace, Hermione is lured inside, and a Phrygian eunuch crawls out from the roof and announces (in song) that Orestes and Pylades have tried to kill Helen, and that her fate is unknown. Menelaos arrives to find Orestes and Hermione on the palace roof, with Elektra and Pylades holding torches to burn the palace down. Apollo appears on the *mēchanē* and announces that Helen has been taken to dwell among the gods, that Menelaos is to rule in Sparta, and that Orestes and Hermione will marry and live happily ever after.

ANALYSIS: In no other surviving play does Euripides push so boldly at the boundaries of myth. The Furies are not the visible characters of *Eumenides*, but the figments of Orestes' guilty conscience. The trial by the Argives and the intervention of Tyndareus are clearly Euripides' inventions, as are the attempted murder of Helen and the abduction of Hermione. Tyndareus admits that his daughter Klytaimestra killed her husband, but asks why did Orestes not prosecute her for murder, thereby undermining all that went on in *Oresteia*. Euripides' most brilliant coup is the Phrygian slave, the marginalized foreigner who sings the messenger speech and provides a black comic touch to the end. Throughout the play Apollo and his command to Orestes are blamed for the situation, and his appearance at the end does little to restore faith in him ("I was afraid," remarks Orestes, "that I was hearing the voice of a demon"). These are not heroes, and although Orestes and Elektra do enjoy the audience's sympathy, they have become vicious fiends by the end, and one can see how they could well have killed their mother. On a psychological approach Elektra and Pylades can be seen as projections of Orestes' own personality, Elektra his emotional side (which dominates the first half) and Pylades his rational side (which plans the events of the latter half). In many ways this is Euripides' most brilliant piece of theatre, as at the end speaking characters occupy all four levels of the playing space.

Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis*

DATE: Produced after Euripides' death (perhaps 405).

COMPETITION: Won first prize with *Bacchae* and *Alkmaion at Corinth*.

CHARACTERS: Agamemnon, Old Man, Menelaos, Messenger, Klytaimestra, Iphigeneia, Achilles, [second Messenger]; Orestes (silent).

CHORUS: Women of Chalkis, who have come to visit the camp.

SETTING: The Greek camp at Aulis.

SYNOPSIS: To get the winds to take his ships to Troy, Agamemnon must sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia to Artemis. He has written to his wife to bring Iphigeneia from Argos on the pretext that she will marry the young hero Achilles, but now sends the old man with another letter, telling Klytaimestra not to come. When Menelaos intercepts the old man, a furious argument results between the brothers, Agamemnon refusing to sacrifice his daughter and Menelaos insisting on the expedition to retrieve Helen. A messenger announces the imminent arrival of Klytaimestra and Iphigeneia, and Agamemnon's great distress at his situation changes Menelaos' mind; he will no longer insist on the sacrifice. But Agamemnon realizes that the army will insist on the expedition and that his daughter is doomed in either event. Klytaimestra and Iphigeneia are greeted by Agamemnon, and then encounter Achilles who knows nothing of the proposed marriage. The old man reveals all to them, and Klytaimestra begs Achilles to save her daughter. Husband and wife debate the matter bitterly, the army ("the mob") demands the sacrifice, and even Achilles is powerless to stop them. Iphigeneia expresses her willingness to die for her country so that the Greeks may conquer Troy. She asks only that her mother not hate her father, and then leaves to die. In the received text a second messenger describes the preparations for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and the miraculous substitution of a deer in her place on the altar, but this is likely a later addition to bring this play in line with the plot of *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*.

ANALYSIS: A bold retelling of the myth by Euripides, giving Iphigeneia a voice and putting Klytaimestra in a new light. Heroism is deflated: Agamemnon the war-lord has become a politician dependent on retaining the support of the army, Menelaos can think only of his personal honor, while Achilles is reduced to a cocky young hero who cannot influence events. Aristotle found Iphigeneia's change of heart hard to accept, and indeed some scenes have the feel of melodrama (Menelaos' sudden change of mind, Achilles glorying in his own reputation, and of course Iphigeneia's patriotic declamation). Underlying it all is a sense of fatigue and despair – the Athenians and Spartans had now been at war with each other for over twenty years, and to talk of Greek unity must have left a sour taste in the mouths of the spectators. Events are out of control, and only the mob has real power; the heroes seem to be watching events pass by them. Are the Greek warriors and indeed Greece in general worthy of the sacrifice being made by Iphigeneia? More than any other extant Greek play, the received text is in real doubt as lines, speeches, and whole scenes have been altered or added. The prologue is an odd mix of anapestic dialogue and an iambic soliloquy, while the happy ending is very likely not what Euripides wrote; his original very likely ended at line 1531 when the chorus bid Iphigeneia farewell. The most recent editor (Diggle – OCT) discerns four layers of text, from genuine Euripides to certainly not by Euripides.

Euripides' *Bacchae* (*Bacchantes*)

DATE: Produced after Euripides' death (perhaps 405).

COMPETITION: Won first prize with *Iphigeneia at Aulis* and *Alkmaion at Corinth*.

CHARACTERS: Dionysos, Kadmos, Teiresias, Pentheus, Servant of Pentheus, Messenger, Second Messenger, Agave.

CHORUS: Female followers of Dionysos from the east.

SETTING: The palace at Thebes.

SYNOPSIS: The god Dionysos, son of Zeus and a Theban princess (Semele), has come to Thebes to bring his worship to his home city. For not believing in his godhood, the women of Thebes have been driven from their city to the mountain, while Dionysos, disguised as a human priest, awaits the appearance of the king, his cousin Pentheus. The seer Teiresias and Pentheus' aged grandfather (Kadmos) have dressed as devotees of the new god and prepare to join his revels, but are rebuked by Pentheus. The disguised Dionysos is brought before Pentheus and then imprisoned in the stables, from which he escapes with consummate ease, as lightning and fire destroy the stables. A messenger brings Pentheus news of the women on the mountain, who exist in harmony with nature until the men attempt to capture them, at which point they run riot over the hillsides and destroy surrounding farms and herds. Pentheus prepares to lead out his army, but when Dionysos asks "Would you like to see them on the mountain?," he falls under the spell of the god. In the next scene Dionysos leads him entranced and dressed as a female worshipper off to the mountain. Another messenger reports how Pentheus was discovered by the women and was torn apart by his own female relatives. Agave, Pentheus' mother, arrives carrying what she thinks is the head of a young lion, in reality the head of her son. Kadmos brings her back to reality and the horror of what she has done. Dionysos appears to justify his vengeance and to announce the future fate of the characters.

ANALYSIS: Arguably the greatest of Greek tragedies, and one that has been vigorously debated by the critics. Is this a late realization by Euripides of "real" religion, or is it an attack on Dionysos as an essentially hostile force to civilization? At the end Dionysos is clearly a typical Euripidean deity ("gods should not be like men in their passions"), a god for whom personal honor is all that matters. Or do we look primarily at Pentheus and see a disturbed young man who has repressed the essential liberating force that is Dionysos? Dionysos can be a deity of great blessings, as the chorus and other characters keep reminding us, but if rejected, can be a god of great destruction – a powerful force then in the life of humanity. Much discussion involves whether to take the scene with Kadmos and Teiresias seriously or as near-comedy – remember that Kadmos' piety stems from wanting a god in the family and Teiresias reminds one of a smooth-talking contemporary sophist. As the traditional version has Pentheus and his soldiers routed by Dionysos and his maenads, the plot-line by which Pentheus goes in disguise to the mountain and is killed by his own family is likely Euripides' invention.

Euripides' *Cyclops*

DATE: Unknown, both 425 and 410–406 have been suggested with confidence.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Silenos, Odysseus, Cyclops (Polyphemos); Odysseus' men (silent).

CHORUS: Satyrs.

SETTING: The cave of the Cyclops on Mount Etna (Sicily).

SYNOPSIS: A parody of *Odyssey* 9, *Cyclops* adds Silenos and satyrs to the encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops. Silenos relates how he and the satyrs went in search of Dionysus, were ship-wrecked, and forced to serve as shepherds for the Cyclops. There is no wine or merriment in their wretched lives. Odysseus and his sailors arrive, seeking food and drink which Silenos offers to sell them from the Cyclops' larder. They are interrupted by the return of Polyphemos, who refuses their request for hospitality, threatens to eat the humans, and disavows any fear for the gods ("I sacrifice to the greatest of deities, my stomach"). The Cyclops takes Odysseus and his men inside the cave, from which Odysseus returns to describe the murder of two of his sailors and the horrible meal of the Cyclops and to report that he has gotten the Cyclops (who has never encountered wine) drunk. He asks the satyrs' help in blinding the Cyclops and effecting their escape. The drunken Polyphemos lurches on stage, we have the obligatory *Outis*-scene ("my name is Nobody"), and Silenos is carried off inside as the Cyclops' bed-mate. The blinding takes place off stage, and Odysseus flees with his men and the satyrs. When Odysseus' true name is revealed, the Cyclops realizes that an ancient oracle has come true.

ANALYSIS: This is the only complete satyr-drama that we possess, and we should not to assume that all satyr-dramas looked like this. It is a parody of epic (*Odyssey* 9) rather than of tragedy; in the 430s the comedian Kratinos had done a comic treatment of the same material but without satyrs. It can be instructive to trace the development of the Cyclops, from savage monster in *Odyssey* 9 (he eats his meat raw), to sophistic individualist in Euripides, to the monster in love (Philoxenos, Theokritos). Three worlds intersect in this play: civilized humanity, the anti-world of the satyrs, and the amoral brutality of the Cyclops. Ultimately it is a pleasant spoof of a more serious story, with liberation at the end, a liberation achieved through wine – in the last line the satyrs promise to "serve Bacchus forever."

[Euripides'] *Rhesos*

DATE: Unknown – if by Euripides, then probably an early work (ca. 450).

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Hektor, Aeneas, Dolon, Messenger, Rhesos, Odysseus, Diomedes, Athene, Paris, Charioteer, Muse.

CHORUS: Trojan sentries.

SETTING: A Trojan outpost near the Greek camp.

SYNOPSIS: The chorus wake Hektor to inform him that there watch-fires are burning in the Greek camp. Hektor wishes to attack straightaway, but Aeneas cautions him to find out what is happening. Dolon volunteers to spy on the Greeks in return for the horses of Achilles as spoil of battle. A messenger announces the coming of Rhesos, king of Thrace, son of a river-god and a Muse, at the head of a powerful army. This invincible warrior has come to help the Trojans, but Hektor reproaches him for coming late in the war. Rhesos explains his delay and the two plan an attack for the morning which will be fatal for the Greeks. Hektor sends Rhesos and his men to a camping-place. Enter Odysseus and Diomedes, who have captured Dolon and are seeking to kill the Trojan leaders. Athene directs them to slay Rhesos and take his splendid horses as plunder. Paris arrives, looking for Hektor, but is deceived by Athene who adopts the guise of Aphrodite, Paris' protecting deity. A wounded Thracian charioteer crawls in, announcing the death of Rhesos and the theft of his horses and blaming this on Hektor. Hektor, however, sees this as the work of Odysseus, a suspicion that is confirmed by Rhesos' mother (a Muse), who enters with the body of her son, casts blame on Athene and Odysseus, and predicts the posthumous honors for her son.

ANALYSIS: Is this a play by Euripides? He did write a *Rhesos*, but even in antiquity there was a suspicion that this play was not his work. If genuine, which one doubts, it may be an early work or possibly another play in the fourth position, another Euripidean experiment in drama. The last scene does contain a familiar establishment of a cult, but is rather harsh on Athens and Athene. On the whole the quick pace and lack of any tragic depth argue against Euripides' authorship. It is more likely that this is an example of fourth-century tragedy, long on thrills and short on substance. A compelling argument has been made for Macedonian authorship 350–325. It does play well, with brisk scenes and suitably theatrical posturings – but “melodrama” might be a better word than “tragedy.” There is an ongoing theme of heroism here: the impetuous and rather unsympathetic Hektor, the cocksure Dolon (complete with disguise of wolfskin), more than a little of the *miles gloriosus* about Rhesos, and the two Greeks, crafty Odysseus and blunt Diomedes (“you go horse-stealing; I'll do the killing”). Along with *Cyclops*, this is the only play of the extant canon that dramatizes a scene from Homer.

Aristophanes' *Acharnians*

DATE: 425 – Lenaia.

COMPETITION: Aristophanes finished first, Kratinos second with *Tempest-Tossed*, and Eupolis third with *New Moons*.

CHARACTERS: Dikaiopolis, Herald, Amphytheos, Envoy to Persia, Theoros, daughter of Dikaiopolis, Euripides' servant, Euripides, Lamachos, Megarian, the Megarian's daughters, Informer, Boeotian, Nikarchos, Servant of Lamachos, Herald, Derketes, Groomsman, Messengers. Pseudartabas, Thracians, eunuchs, pipers (silent).

CHORUS: Old men from Acharnae, a large community in Attica.

SETTING: The Pnyx at Athens; then the house of Dikaiopolis.

SYNOPSIS: The war with Sparta is now in its sixth year. Dikaiopolis ("Just City") tries to persuade the Athenian assembly to discuss peace, but when they refuse, he sends Amphytheos to Sparta to negotiate a private peace for himself. He thus incurs the wrath of the chorus, men from Acharnae, a large community outside Athens, who were strong supporters of the war. He deals with them by parodying a hostage-scene from Euripides' controversial *Telephos*, and delivering a major speech in which he blames both Athens and Sparta for an unnecessary and destructive war. He next encounters Lamachos (a general whose name means "battle"), a wonderful example of the swaggering soldier. In the second part of the play, we see the consequences of his private peace, as Dikaiopolis entertains visitors from enemy territory, including a Megarian who will sell his own daughters for food, and a Boiotian who wants to take home an informer packed up like a vase ("we don't have these at home"). Lamachos is summoned to deal with an enemy incursion, Dikaiopolis to attend a drinking party. The former arrives home wounded on a stretcher, while our hero is carried off drunk in the arms of music-girls.

ANALYSIS: There has been much discussion as to what extent this comedy represents the personal views of Aristophanes. Twice Dikaiopolis speaks as if he were the poet himself, reminding the audience of what Kleon did to him last year, although others point out that Dikaiopolis adopts so many roles and speaks in so many voices that one cannot assume that he is meant to be Aristophanes throughout. One of the defining aspects of Aristophanes' comedy is his fascination with tragedy (Euripides in particular) and in this play he seems to be insisting on a serious role for comedy ("comedy too knows what is right") and to have coined a new term *trygōidia* ("wine-lees song") as a counterpoint to *tragōidia*. The humor is immediate and topical, as five (and probably six) of the characters represent real Athenians. One of Aristophanes' strong points is his use of metaphor. The Greek for "treaty" (*spondai*) also means "drink-offering", and thus the three treaties brought back by Amphytheos are shown as "vintages," for five, ten, and thirty years, while the motif of the drinking party is carried on throughout the latter part of the comedy. Some regard Dikaiopolis' cause as undermined by an essential selfishness, but that is to read ancient plays with modern attitudes.

Aristophanes' *Knights* (*Hippeis*, *Equites*, *Horsemen*)

DATE: 424 – Lenaia.

COMPETITION: Aristophanes won first prize, Kratinos second with *Satyr*s and Aristomenes third with *Sheath-Carriers*.

CHARACTERS: First slave [Demosthenes?], Second slave [Nikias?], Sausage-seller [Agorakritos], Paphlagon, Demos. Boy, treaties costumed as prostitutes, slaves [silent].

CHORUS: Athenian knights.

SETTING: The house of Demos.

SYNOPSIS: Aristophanes creates a political allegory on which the city of Athens becomes a household, run by a crotchety old man named “Demos” (“the People”), with his slaves representing the politicians. A new slave (Paphlagon), representing the demagogue Kleon, has taken over the household, and two other slaves discover a prophecy that he can be overthrown only by an even worse slave, to wit a “Sausage-seller.” Such a character opportunely happens by and with the aid of the knights, who formed the richest and most conservative group in society, he takes on Paphlagon in two head-to-head encounters. The second encounter, the formal *agôn*, is held before Demos, who will judge which of the two is the better benefactor of the people. The Sausage-seller is able to demonstrate that Paphlagon has been acting in his own interest, and not for the people, and is awarded the victory. The Sausage-seller turns out to be a partisan of the glorious good old days of the victories over Persia, and rejuvenates Demos to his former self, while Paphlagon is banished to sell sausages at the city gates.

ANALYSIS: *Knights* is the first example of the “demagogue comedy,” an entire play devoted to the attack of one popular politician, in this case Kleon. Comedy was certainly political before *Knights*, but it may be the case that the political part was incidental to the comedy as a whole. The name “Paphlagon” suggests “Paphlagonia,” a region from which Athens drew some slaves, and also *paphlazein* (“to splutter” – Kleon had a distinctive speaking voice). Comedy unfairly depicts the demagogues as vulgar and illiterate tradesmen, whose citizenship could be disputed, who were dishonest and in politics solely to enrich themselves, who were exploiting rather than serving the people. The truth is more likely that they came from the commercial middle class, who made their money rather than inherit it, and who were now moving into political life. Aristophanes clearly dislikes Kleon – they did come from the same deme – but one always wonders how much is sheer personal attack and how much comic exploitation of a comic stereotype. Still it is true that Aristophanes tends to portray the right wing more favorably, especially the knights, and there are frequent suggestions in his comedies that the people are easily deceived and misled by their leaders. The ending may be part of the comic fondness for a utopia in the past or represent a real feeling that things *were* better back then. Kleon is mentioned only once by name in the play, in a little choral lyric, where the chorus sings, “it will be the sweetest light of day / when Kleon is destroyed.”

Aristophanes' *Wasps* (*Sphēkes*, *Vespaē*)

DATE: 422 – Lenaia.

COMPETITION: *Wasps* finished second, Philonides first with *Precontest* and Leukon third with *Ambassadors* – *Precontest* may have been written by Aristophanes as well.

CHARACTERS: Xanthias, Sosias, Bdelykleon, Philokleon, Kyon ("The Dog"), Guest, Bread-seller, Complainant. Slaves, Labes the Dog, household utensils, music-girl, Chairephon, witness, Karkinos and sons (silent).

CHORUSES: Old men costumed as wasps; sub-chorus of boys.

SETTING: The house of Philokleon and Bdelykleon.

SYNOPSIS: The slaves Xanthias and Sosias explain that the old man of the house, Philokleon ("Love-Kleon") suffers from an addiction to jury service and that his son, Bdelykleon ("Loathe-Kleon") has locked his father in the house to keep him at home and thrown a net over the doors and windows. The old man tries various ruses to get out and eventually chews through the net to join his fellow jurors who are costumed as wasps. In the *agôn*, the father argues that jurors are respected and indeed feared in Athens ("we're the only ones that Kleon doesn't bite"), while the son demonstrates that they are just being used by the politicians. He convinces his father to remain a juror, but to stay at home and judge domestic matters. The first case is the trial of a dog Labes ("Snatcher") who has wolfed down a cheese, prosecuted by "The Dog" from Kydathenaion. By a bit of trickery the old man is led to acquit a defendant for the first time in his life. In the final part of the comedy, the son teaches his father how to dress for and behave in polite society, and then takes him off to a drinking-party, where he insults the guests, steals a music-girl, and assaults a bystander on the way home. In the final scene the old man dances Karkinos and his sons into the ground and whirls his way off stage.

ANALYSIS: *Wasps* has three distinct themes: the jury-system, the demagogues such as Kleon, and a reversal of the roles of father and son. Those who consider Aristophanes as essentially an anti-democrat will see this play not just a spoof on the Athenians' known litigious behavior, but an attack on the core of the democracy which was the participatory jury-system. But Philokleon and the wasps are treated with fondness and good humor, and it is more likely that the satire of the comedy is aimed at the exploitation of the jury system by the demagogues. Kleon had recently raised their pay and he and other popular politicians would use the law-courts as a political weapon against their rivals. The dogs, Kyon and Labes, are thinly disguised politicians, Kleon and Laches, who were political opponents in the 420s. The chorus is another instance of Aristophanes' ability to exploit metaphor, for jurors sit in swarms and "sting" with their verdicts; therefore, let them be wasps. Athens is just like a wasps' nest, for there too are "drones" who do nothing – politicians. The reversal of father and son is very well handled ("just wait until my son dies; you see, I'm his only father"), although the final third of the play is only loosely connected to what goes before. Philokleon is a brilliant comic creation, the irrepressible jack-in-the-box, while some see Bdelykleon as a colorless spoil-sport, or worse a sinister anti-democrat. Yet Aristophanes all but identifies himself with the son, and gives him a grand send-off at the end.

Aristophanes' *Peace* (*Pax*, *Eirēnē*)

DATE: 421 – Dionysia.

COMPETITION: *Peace* finished second, with Eupolis first with *Spongers* and Leukon third with *Phratries*.

CHARACTERS: Two servants, Trygaios, child of Trygaios, Hermes, War, Riot, Hierokles, Sickle-maker, Arms-dealer, son of Lamachos, son of Kleonymos. Peace, Opora, Theoria, potter, Helmet-maker, Spear-seller (silent).

CHORUS: Farmers.

SETTING: The house of Trygaios; Mount Olympos; the house of Trygaios again.

SYNOPSIS: As the great idea of this play, Trygaios flies up to the gods, mounted not on Pegasos like Bellerophon, but on a gigantic dung-beetle. He arrives to find that the gods have deserted Greece, leaving War in charge and Peace imprisoned in a cave. With the connivance of Hermes and the assistance of a chorus of farmers, he is able to draw Peace, represented on stage as a giant statue, out of her cave and thus put War to flight. Through Hermes Peace asks Trygaios what has happened in her absence. Trygaios is sent back to earth with Peace's handmaids, Opora ("Harvest") and Theoria ("Festival"), the former a gift for the Athenian Council, the latter for himself. Arriving home, he deals harshly with a self-important oracle-monger (Hierokles) and those arms merchants who have profited from war, but will no longer. He celebrates his union to Theoria with a marvelous feast, at which two boys sing songs. The son of Lamachos the soldier sings martial verses from Homer, while the son of Kleonymos (who allegedly abandoned his shield in battle) sings a famous poem from Archilochos about throwing his shield away and surviving to laugh (and write) about it.

ANALYSIS: A comedy of high exuberance and good spirits, *Peace* was produced only weeks before the actual truce between the Athenians and Spartans that ended their ten-year war. It reflects not so much the actual treaty but the expectation and good feelings that must have been in the air. The fact that Aristophanes' great foe, Kleon, had been killed in battle over the winter will also have contributed to the buoyant spirit of the drama. Perhaps the most loosely structured comedy that we have of the eleven by Aristophanes, it begins with a brilliant parody of Euripides' *Bellerophon* and offers a new explanation for the start of the war, one that fourth-century critics mistook for historical fact. Even eight years after his death Aristophanes could not resist attacking Perikles for complicity in bringing on the war. Images of smells and odor dominate this comedy, from the disgusting smell of the dung on which the beetle feeds, to the ambrosial scent of the goddess and her handmaids, to the aroma of food cooking and the bouquet of good wines. There is no formal *agôn* in this play – who could speak for war when peace was imminent? – while the *parabasis* has mainly to do with drama, both tragedy and comedy.

Aristophanes' *Clouds* (*Nubes*, *Nephelai*)

DATE: The original *Clouds* was produced in 423. We have an incomplete revision ca. 419/18.

COMPETITION: In 423 *Clouds* was third at the Dionysia – Kratinos first with *Wine-flask* and Ameipsias second with *Konnos*.

CHARACTERS: Strepsiades, Pheidippides, Servant, pupil of Sokrates, Sokrates, Stronger Argument, Weaker Argument, two creditors, second pupil.

CHORUS: Clouds, costumed as women.

SETTING: The house of Strepsiades and the “reflectory” of Sokrates.

SYNOPSIS: Strepsiades (“Twister’s Son”) is an elderly farmer married to a wealthy aristocratic lady. His son (Pheidippides) has run his father into debt because of his passion for horses. Strepsiades wants his son to attend the “reflectory” of Sokrates and there learn the argument that will get him out of having to pay his debts. The youth refuses and the old man must go himself. At the “reflectory” he meets certain of the pupils, Sokrates himself suspended in a balloon, and the Clouds, the patron deities of the new learning. He agrees to be initiated into the mysteries of the school, but in a subsequent teaching-scene cannot learn or remember anything he has been taught. In frustration he compels his son to go to the “reflectory,” where the youth witnesses the *agōn* between the Stronger and the Weaker Arguments, which the Weaker (“Wrong”) wins and becomes the boy’s teacher. In the final scene Pheidippides’ new learning enables his father to avoid paying his creditors, but it leads also to a battle between father and son over taste in poetry and to the conclusion that in the new order children may beat their parents. At this point the Clouds reveal that they are instruments of the traditional gods, punishing men who go too far. In a fit of rage Strepsiades burns down the “reflectory.”

ANALYSIS: First and foremost, this is a partially completed revision and we do not know what the original version of 423 was like. An ancient source tells us that substantial changes were made in the *parabasis*, where the poet complains of the original play’s poor showing, in the *agōn* between the Arguments, and at the end “where the reflectory is burned down.” Thus one may not be able to deal with this play in the same manner that one would a finished comedy. Then there is the Sokrates-problem. Apart from certain physical characteristics, the comic character is a deliberate distortion of the real Sokrates, who never taught in a school, never taught for money, or gave instruction in science, grammar, or rhetoric. Does this indicate malice on the poet’s part (as befits the hidebound conservatism that some ascribe to Aristophanes), or a joke that got away, or just that Aristophanes didn’t know the difference between Sokrates and a sophist and didn’t care? Plato in his *Apology* will blame the Athenians’ prejudices against Sokrates on the caricature in *Clouds*, but in *Symposium* Aristophanes is present as part of the gathering of intellectuals. This is the only surviving comedy in which the great idea is recanted at the end.

Aristophanes' *Birds* (*Ornithes*, *Aves*)

DATE: 414 – Dionysia.

COMPETITION: *Birds* was second, Ameipsias first with *Revellers* and Phrynichos third with *Hermit*.

CHARACTERS: Euelpides, Peisetairos, Errand-bird, The Hoopoe (Tereus), Priest, Poet, Oracle-seller, Meton, Inspector, Decree-seller, two Messengers, Iris, Herald, Father-beater, Kinesias, Informer, Prometheus, Poseidon, Herakles, Triballian god. Nightingale, various birds, servants, Basileia (silent).

CHORUS: Birds.

SETTING: A deserted part of the world; later the city of Cloudcuckooland in the sky.

SYNOPSIS: Two Athenians, Euelpides (“Good Hope”) and Peisetairos (“Persuasive Companion”), have fled Athens to avoid politics and law courts, and are seeking Tereus, a mythical human with Athenian connections, who has been turned into a hoopoe. There Peisetairos has his great idea: to found a city in the clouds and intercept the worship and sacrifices of humanity to the gods, thereby starving the gods into submission. He persuades a hostile chorus of birds that they used to rule the universe and can do so again. All are now on side and in the second part of the play, the new city (“Cloudcuckooland”) is established and all sorts of intruders arrive. All are dismissed, the passing goddess Iris is threatened with assault, and a messenger announces that Athens has become bird-crazy. Three more serious intruders are dealt with (a father-beater, Kinesias the “New Musician,” and an informer), before Prometheus arrives to say that the blockade has put the gods in a bad way, that an embassy from the gods is on its way, and that Peithetairos must demand Basileia (“Princess”) as his bride as part of the terms. The divine ambassadors agree to Peisetairos’ conditions, and at the end of the comedy he enters in royal triumph as the husband of Basileia and the new ruler in heaven.

ANALYSIS: Perhaps the most critically disputed play by Aristophanes, *Birds* is for some a fanciful escape from an unpleasant reality, a reaction to the current military campaign in Sicily, a sympathetic exploration of Athenian aspirations, a non-topical flight of wish-fulfilling fantasy, a presentation of tyrannical megalomania, or a black and ironic dystopia. Is Peisetairos achieving what any of us would want, to marry a goddess and become an all-powerful ruler, or is he a self-seeking tyrant with delusions of grandeur? Is the end of the play an upbeat fantasy or tinged with dark overtones? For example, Euelpides vanishes halfway through, leaving Peisetairos all the glory, while the birds who used to be free creatures are now confined in a city. Birds will never be harmed by humans ever again, promises Peisetairos, but in the scene with the ambassadors he is roasting birds “convicted of treason.” Or are we reading a marvelous piece of comic fantasy through modern eyes? On the visual level the chorus composed of twenty-four different birds must have provided a most impressive spectacle, along with the various bird-characters, the humans dressed as fledgling birds, and the final victorious entry by chariot of Peisetairos and his new bride.

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*

DATE: 411 – probably at the Lenaia.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Lysistrata, Kalonike, Myrrhine, Lampito, Proboulos, Kinesias, Spartan herald, Spartan delegate, two Athenian delegates. Various women, slaves, Scythian archers, Manes, Spartan and Athenian delegates, Reconciliation, Door-keeper (silent).

CHORUSES: Old women, old men.

SETTING: The Acropolis.

SYNOPSIS: In order to bring the war to an end, all the wives of Athens, in co-operation with women throughout Greece, have taken over the Acropolis, seized the treasury, and launched a sex-strike until their men cease from the fighting. A chorus of old men make their way up the steep slope of the Acropolis carrying large beams to batter down the women's defenses. After a chorus of old women easily fend off the old men, Lysistrata debates a *proboulos* (a current magistrate) on why war *is* a woman's affair and how women would change things in the city. In the second part of the play the sex-strike is going badly as the women "just want to get laid" and seek excuses for leaving the Acropolis. Lysistrata rallies her forces, while Myrrhine seduces her husband and leaves him at a critical moment. A Spartan envoy arrives in obvious sexual distress – things are just as hard at Sparta. The choruses of old men and women are reconciled, while Lysistrata reads the riot act to both Spartans and Athenians – they have a past history of co-operation and should be friends not enemies. Athenians and Spartans sing each other's songs and harmony returns to Greece.

ANALYSIS: Sexual imagery dominates this play – the principal recurring image is the erect male phallus, and the names "Myrrhine" ("Pussy") and "Kinesias" ("Rod") carry double-entendres, especially in the scene where Myrrhine sexually teases her husband. *Lysistrata* seems to be the first comedy with a dominant female character (certainly a politically active female) and, while it does exploit the male stereotype about women (fond of sex, wine, and gossip), there are moments of real empathy, especially in Lysistrata's description of how women are affected by war ("war's a woman's affair"). A genuine harmony pervades the ending, between male and female and between Athenians and Spartans. Some have seen the theme of peace with Sparta as essentially a fantasy, since in their view no-one in the aftermath of Sicily and the Spartan occupation of Attica could possibly suggest peace, but that is exactly what the oligarchs, who would take power briefly in 411, were proposing. Thus the play may shed light on Aristophanes' own personal views. Beneath the impressive figure of Lysistrata ("she who breaks up armies") may be found the current priestess of Athene, Lysimache ("she who breaks up battles"), and the action is set on the Acropolis with its temples and shrines. Lysimache would be the best-known woman at Athens, known for herself and not as a man's wife, daughter etc.

Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* (*Thesmophoriazousai*)

DATE: 411 – probably at the Dionysia.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Euripides, Euripides' relative (Mnesilochos), Agathon's servant, Agathon, Herald(ess), First Woman (Kritylla), Second Woman, Kleisthenes, Prytanis, Scythian policeman. Women's servants, Terydon (boy-piper), Artemisia (belly-dancer)[silent].

CHORUS: Women celebrating the Thesmophoria.

SETTING: The Thesmophorion at Athens.

SYNOPSIS: The Thesmophoria was a three-day festival held in the autumn in honor of Demeter and her daughter and attended only by women. Here the women of Athens hold a meeting to discuss what to do about Euripides, who has been depicting them unfavorably in his tragedies. Euripides gets wind of this and with his relative asks Agathon, a tragic poet, who looks like a woman and dresses like a woman, to infiltrate this meeting and plead his case. When Agathon understandably refuses, the relative allows himself to be singed, shaved, and dressed in women's clothing. At the meeting, a close parody of the Athenian assembly, one woman is angry that Euripides has alerted their husbands to their carryings-on, for another his "atheism" has robbed her of half her trade in wreathes for religious occasions. Then the relative argues that women should be grateful that Euripides has not told the whole truth about them. Into the furious uproar that erupts enters Kleisthenes, the only male allowed to attend women's gatherings, who tells the women that Euripides has sent a male relative to infiltrate their meeting. Unmasked and proven without doubt to be male, later bound to a plank and guarded by an uncouth barbarian, the relative engages in parodies from four of Euripides' tragedies (including his *Helen* from the previous year) in an attempt to escape, but to no avail. Finally Euripides makes a deal with the women: he will refrain from abusing them if they release his kinsman. The women distract the policeman while Euripides, disguised as an old woman, frees his relative.

ANALYSIS: Arguably one of the wittiest of Western comedies, it has languished in critical appreciation, partly because literary parody is less appealing than out-and-out political satire and partly because the sex is "kinky," rather than the straight heterosexuality of *Lysistrata*. Just about every male in the play dresses up as a woman at some point, and gender is completely confused. Agathon is known also from the distinctive portrait of him in Plato's *Symposium*, while Kleisthenes is the arch-effeminate of Old Comedy. Of the plays parodied we do have *Helen* (412) and can thus examine directly how Aristophanic parody operated. Two of the other plays are also recent, *Palamedes* (415) and *Andromeda* (412), and both seem to have distinctive visual moments that lent themselves to comic caricature. A South Italian vase (the Würzburg Telephos; see fig. 4.3) is now agreed to show a scene from this comedy. Also of interest is the presentation of the women's gathering as if it were a meeting of the Athenian assembly, this at a time when the democracy was under threat and would soon be suspended by what we call the "Revolution of the 400."

Aristophanes' *Frogs* (*Ranae*, *Batrachoi*)

DATE: 405 – at the Lenaia. A second performance has been dated to the same festival, the Dionysia of 405, the Lenaia of 404, and to 403, the year of the democratic restoration.

COMPETITION: *Frogs* won first prize, Platon second with *Kleophon*, Phrynichos third with *Muses*.

CHARACTERS: Xanthias, Dionysos, Herakles, a corpse, Charon, Gatekeeper, Serving-woman of Persephone, Plathane, Innkeeperess, slave of Plouton, Euripides, Aeschylus, Plouton. Corpse-bearers, serving-women, Scythian archers, Muse of Euripides (silent).

CHORUS(ES): Frogs (unseen), the souls of initiates.

SETTING: The road to the Underworld; the house of Plouton.

SYNOPSIS: Euripides and Sophokles have recently died, and Dionysos, the patron god of drama, with his cheeky slave (Xanthias) goes disguised as Herakles to the underworld to bring back Euripides. His adventures along the way include a rowing lesson with Charon, a singing contest with a chorus of frogs, a threatening gatekeeper, a seductive serving-girl, two angry women, and a whipping intended to distinguish the god from his human slave. After the *parabasis*, which contains some serious advice from the poet on contemporary politics, Dionysos finds himself judging a contest between Aeschylus and Euripides for the throne of tragedy, the winner to be brought back to Athens. The formal *agōn* decides nothing, and after prologues are compared, choruses scrutinized, a Euripidean monody brilliantly parodied, actual lines weighed, and political questions about Athens posed and answered, Dionysos is forced by Plouton to make a choice (“one is so good, and the other so good”) and he chooses Aeschylus, “the one in whom my soul delights.” An angry Euripides is dismissed with three of his own verses, and at the end Plouton formally sends Dionysos and Aeschylus back to Athens “to save the city.”

ANALYSIS: Along with *Birds* this is Aristophanes' masterpiece, and can be approached from several critical angles. There is a strong religious component, as the main character is the god of the dramatic festival, a gathering of initiates form a “holy chorus,” and for some the journey of Dionysos is a search for his identity. From the dramatic point of view, the comedy establishes the foundations of Western literary criticism (Euripides: “art for the sake of art,” Aeschylus: “the poet as moral teacher”), but Dionysos seems finally to decide on personal preference. *Frogs* can be viewed also as Aristophanes' most political comedy, not just in the *parabasis*, where a political amnesty and a complete change of leadership are proposed, but also at the end, where the final questions posed to the poets have to do with the political path for Athens, and Plouton commands certain political leaders “to get themselves down here as fast as they can.” In fact all themes meet in a telling passage in the last scene, where Plouton asks Dionysos why he has come down to fetch a poet, and the god replies “to save the city.” Set in the underworld, a comedy about the city and its leaders, the city and its cults, the city and its poets, *Frogs* is an elegant farewell to Athens' greatness.

Aristophanes' *Assembly-Women* (*Ekklesiazousai*)

DATE: 393–391.

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Praxagora, various Athenian women, Blepyros, Neighbor, Chremes, two men, Herald(ess), three old and very ugly women, Young girl, Young Man (Epigenes), Serving-girl, Neighbor's slaves, two young women accompanying Blepyros (silent).

CHORUS: Athenian wives.

SETTING: Before the house of Blepyros and Praxagora.

SYNOPSIS: Praxagora (“act in public”) has organized a scheme that involves the wives of Athens. During the night they have appropriated their husbands’ shoes, cloaks, and walking-sticks, put on false beards, and set out to attend the Athenian assembly. Their plan: to propose and vote that power in the state be handed over to the women. Blepyros, Praxagora’s husband, needing to answer the call of nature, can find only her robe and slippers to wear outside, much to his neighbor’s amusement. Chremes brings the news that the assembly seems to have been dominated by pale-faced cobblers (cobblers stayed indoors to work and thus were pale-skinned, like women) and has voted to put women in charge of the state with Praxagora as leader. There is no formal *agōn*, instead an explanation by Praxagora of how the new order will operate, in terms that remind one of Plato’s *Republic* (which Plato wouldn’t write for another twenty years): community of possessions, common parenting, gender equality. The episodes that show this great idea unfolding include two men bringing (or not bringing) their goods for the common pool, a young man who must have sex with an ugly old woman before he can have his young girlfriend (in the new order “they all shall equal be”), and an invitation to the inaugural dinner.

ANALYSIS: The signs of the decline of Old Comedy are certainly present, principally in the decreased role of the chorus – there is no *parabasis* and some choral interludes are lost – as well as a sense of ennui and fatigue in the play. For the first time none of the characters represents a real Athenian. The comedy begins well enough with a strong female lead bearing a significant name and a worthy great idea, but apart from the scene with the young man carried off by the three ugliest women in the world, it loses its steam in the latter parts. For some critics this is an intentionally ironic play: how to save the city? Turn it over to women! Read in this way the latter scenes are the comedian’s conscious attempt to undo his great idea. But it is more likely that Aristophanes has come up with a good comic theme, perhaps employing some philosophic ideas and social theories which were in the air, added the reversal of gender roles (always good comic material), but not brought the whole thing off with the flair that he would have in his earlier plays.

Aristophanes' *Wealth (Ploutos)*

DATE: 388 – festival unknown.

COMPETITION: The other four comedies were Nikostratos' *Laconians*, Aristomenes' *Admetos*, Nikophon's *Adonis*, and Alkaios' *Pasiphae*.

CHARACTERS: Karion, Chremylos, Ploutos (Wealth), Blepsidemos, Penia (Poverty), wife of Chremylos, Just Man, Informer, Old Woman, Young Man, Hermes, priest of Zeus. Serving-boy, witness, maidservant, other servants (silent).

CHORUS: Old countrymen, fellow-demesmen of Chremylos.

SETTING: The house of Chremylos in Athens.

SYNOPSIS: Proverbially "Wealth is blind," for if Wealth could see and distinguish good men from evil, he would not be going to the latter. Chremylos and his slave Karion are returning from the oracle of Apollo, where Chremylos has been told to persuade the first man he met after leaving the temple to accompany him home. That this blind and filthy individual turns out to be the god Wealth provides the great idea for this comedy: that Wealth regain his sight. Chremylos and his neighbor Blepsidemos are suddenly confronted by an angry female, Poverty, who argues in the formal *agōn* that it is she who makes men virtuous through hard work and a lack of luxury. Poverty is dismissed and Wealth taken to the shrine of the healing-god Asklepios. He returns with his sight restored and everywhere just men are now becoming wealthy. This effect will expand to include all men as they realize that just behavior leads to prosperity. The episodes involve an informer who now has no-one to extort, an old woman whose young lover no longer needs her money, Hermes (the god of merchants, commerce, and thieves) who is now out of a job, and the priest of Zeus, also unemployed because all now worship Wealth, not Zeus. At the end of the comedy Wealth is installed as the new ruling deity.

ANALYSIS: The trend to later comedy is well under way by *Wealth*. Three of the other four comedies produced at the same competition are mythological burlesques, a popular comic sub-genre in the early fourth century. The chorus has one song only, a parody of a poem by Philoxenos, and the other interludes are marked with the entry *chorou* ("of the chorus"). Most of the personal jokes are brief one-liners in the first part of the play and no character represents a real individual. The slave, Karion, has as much of the action as his master Chremylos and is well on his way to becoming the cunning slave of later comedy. Critical discussion involves whether Aristophanes' own views have undergone a distinct change from his earlier "conservative" standpoint, or whether (as with *Assembly-Women*) the play should be read as ironic. Critics have not missed the fact that Poverty speaks second in the *agōn* (the usual winning position) and that Chremylos does not so much win the debate as ride roughshod over Poverty. To many this suggests that the entire second half of the comedy should be read as intentionally ironic.

Menander's *The Grouch* (*Old Cantankerous*, *Dyskolos*)

DATE: 316 – at the Lenaia.

COMPETITION: Won first prize.

CHARACTERS: Pan, Chaireas, Sostratos, Pyrrhias, Knemon, Knemon's daughter, Daos, Gorgias, Sikon, Getas, Simiche, Kallippides.

CHORUS: Celebrants of Pan – appear only between acts.

SETTING: The shrine of Pan at Phyle, a remote part of Attica.

SYNOPSIS: *Dyskolos* means "a bad-tempered man," in this case Knemon, an old misanthropist who lives far out in the Attic countryside with his daughter. His wife has now left him and gone to live with her son Gorgias (by a previous marriage). Sostratos, a city boy from Athens, has fallen in love at first sight with Knemon's daughter and is trying to arrange matters with her father, who chases him and everyone else away. Daos, Gorgias' slave, reports to his master that someone seems to be romantically interested in his half-sister. Gorgias confronts Sostratos, but finding him a decent sort with good intentions suggests that in order to impress Knemon he pretend to be a hard-working farmer. Unfortunately Sostratos spends all day in the sun doing back-breaking labor, but Knemon never comes by to be impressed. Getas, the major-domo of Sostratos' household, arrives with a group for a picnic at the cave of Pan and attempts to borrow things from Knemon. Knemon's elderly maid-servant, Simiche, has dropped a bucket down the well, and Knemon has fallen in while attempting to retrieve it. When Gorgias rescues him, Knemon sees the error of his man-hating ways, recants of his misanthropy, and entrusts himself and his daughter to Gorgias. Gorgias immediately arranges the marriage of his half-sister to Sostratos, while Sostratos reciprocates by convincing his father (Kallippides) to let Gorgias marry his sister.

ANALYSIS: New Comedy is comedy of the household, neatly packaged into five acts, with themes of love, mistaken identities and assumptions, and a happy ending. It is dominated by the individual actors, with the chorus reduced to singing interludes between the acts, interludes that probably had nothing to do with the play. *The Grouch* is an early effort by Menander, and is marred by too many characters (some appearing only once) and a weak final act, in which two slaves torment an injured Knemon and force him to join the party. The play is dominated by two themes: a character-study of the bad-tempered misanthrope who eventually sees the light and repents of his ways – his first scene is especially good, when he envies Perseus who could fly and thus avoid people, and who possessed the Gorgon's head which turned men into stone ("if I had that, there'd be stone statues everywhere"), and the dichotomy between town and country, carried by Sostratos the young dandy from Athens with a good character and willing to suffer for the woman he wants. The publication of the text of the play (virtually complete) in 1957 was a major event in the history of Greek comedy and thrust Menander into the forefront of critical study.

Menander's *Samian Woman (Samia)* or *Marriage-contract*

DATE: Unknown – probably late in Menander's career (305–300).

COMPETITION: Unknown.

CHARACTERS: Moschion, Chrysis, Parmenion, Demeas, Nikeratos, Cook.

CHORUS: Not identified – the entry <chorou> appears in the text at v. 420.

SETTING: The houses of Demeas and Nikeratos at Athens.

SYNOPSIS: Moschion is the adopted son of Demeas, a wealthy Athenian merchant who along with his neighbor Nikeratos has been away from Athens for the winter. Demeas' mistress, Chrysis ("Goldie") a woman from Samos, has had a child, which died, while Moschion has fathered a child secretly on Nikeratos' daughter. To direct suspicion away from Moschion and his girlfriend, Chrysis has taken the child and pretended that it is her own. All await the return of Demeas and Nikeratos in the spring. When the two men arrive, they discuss a marriage between Moschion and Nikeratos' daughter, a prospect which Moschion welcomes, perhaps too readily. In the third act complications arise. Demeas hears Moschion's old nurse speak of Moschion as the baby's father and concludes that Moschion has seduced (or rather been seduced by) Chrysis. He drives Chrysis out into the street, where she takes refuge with Nikeratos. Moschion, informed by his father that he "knows all," readily admits that the child is his, but cannot understand why father is so upset. Nikeratos, appalled at Chrysis' supposed infidelity, goes in to drive her out of his house, only to find his daughter nursing the child. Moschion puts Demeas in the picture, Demeas takes Chrysis back into his house, and an angry Nikeratos is placated by the prospect of a marriage-feast. In the final act a petulant Moschion threatens to run away and join the foreign legion, but is cajoled back to his own wedding.

ANALYSIS: This is Menander at his mature best. The comedy has far fewer characters than *The Grouch*, and each is drawn with sympathy and distinctiveness: Moschion as the well-behaved adopted son; Demeas the old man who gets mad quickly, usually in tragic language, but calms down equally quickly; and Nikeratos, less bright who angers slowly and stays angry longer. The third and fourth acts are particularly good, when each of the three principals thinks that he knows the whole truth, and they interact at cross-purposes and in witty and succinct language. The play provides valuable light on social customs of the late fourth century: adoption, wedding arrangements, the Athenian household (as a foreigner Chrysis cannot be Demeas' legal wife, but she is so in all but name), travelling merchants, hired chefs, the dependence of sons on fathers etc.

A Note on Meter

With the exception of some comic passages (most notably *Women in the Thesmophoria* 295–311 and Archippos F 27), which parody the official language of the Athenian assembly or of legal formulae, Greek drama is written in verse. Behind the actors' speeches and the songs of the chorus lie formal metrical patterns with distinct rules, rather stricter for tragedy than for comedy.

Greek meter was not what we are used to in English poetry, a formal pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates a familiar and repeated rhythm. The iambic pentameter of Shakespeare, for instance, depends on five stressed syllables to the line:

The **skies** are **painted** **with** unnumber'd **sparks**,
They **are** all **fire**, and **every one** doth **shine**.
(*Julius Caesar* III.63–4)

More obvious are the anapests in the opening lines to Byron's *The Destruction of Sennacherib*:

The Assyrian came **down** like a **wolf** on the **fold**
And his **cohorts** were **gleaming** in **purple** and **gold**.

Greek meter is “quantitative;” that is, it operates on a pattern of long and short syllables, much in the manner of musical notes (e.g. half-notes and quarter-notes). The pattern depended on the time taken to pronounce the syllable. A long syllable (–) took twice

as long to utter as a short syllable (◡), and the pitch accent of the Greek word would not necessarily fall on a long syllable.

The principal meter for both comedy and tragedy is the **iambic trimeter**, described by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1449a23–6) as the closest rhythm to normal speech and used for the prologue and most episodes. An iambic **foot** consists of a short + long [◡ –], two feet equal one **metron** (plural: metra) [× – ◡ –], where × denotes a syllable that can be either short or long. Thus an iambic trimeter (three metra) is designated:

× – ◡ – | × – ◡ – | × – ◡ –

In either foot of a metron, a three-syllable unit may be substituted, under rules that are tighter for tragedy than for comedy: ◡ ◡ – (**anapest**), – ◡ ◡ (**dactyl**), or ◡ ◡ ◡ (**tribrach**), thus creating a rougher metrical pattern that would be noticeable in delivery. This technique is called “resolution,” and Euripides’ steadily increasing use of resolution in his iambic trimeters allows us to date his plays.

A longer iambic system is the **iambic tetrameter catalectic** (“catalectic” [Δ] meaning that the last syllable of the line is missing), composed of four metra and yielding the following scheme:

× – ◡ – | × – ◡ – | × – ◡ – | × – Δ |

It is used in satyr-drama and in comedy, both by the chorus and by participants in the *agōn* (e.g. Weaker Argument in *Clouds*, Euripides in *Frogs*). Comedy also employs systems of **iambic dimeter**, both regular [× – ◡ – | × – ◡ –] and catalectic [× – ◡ – | × – Δ]. Often, but not always, the context is a formal song of abuse, as at *Acharnians* 836–59 or Eupolis F 99.1–22.

Aristotle (*Poetics* 1449a20–3) asserts that the **trochaic tetrameter** was the original meter of tragedy, associated as it was with dancing. The **trochee** [– ◡] is the inverse of the iamb and, like the iamb, two feet equal one metron: [– ◡ – ×]. The usual form is a catalectic tetrameter:

– ◡ – × | – ◡ – × | – ◡ – × | – ◡ – Δ

The evidence seems to bear out Aristotle’s assertion, since in tragedy this meter is found in Aeschylus and then not until the late plays of Euripides. It carries a sense of emotional excitement and action. When choruses in comedy burst onto the scene, they do so in trochaics (as at *Knights* 247). The epirrhematic sections of a comic *parabasis* are normally in trochaic tetrameter catalectic. Trochaic metra allow the same sort of resolutions as do iambic systems.

The **anapest** [◡ ◡ –] similarly uses metra consisting of two feet: [◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ –] and allows resolutions of two longs, a **spondee** [– –], or a **dactyl** [– ◡ ◡]. It occurs in both tragedy and comedy, in dimeters [◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ – | ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ –] and tetrameters, usually catalectic:

◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ – | ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ – | ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ – | ◡ ◡ – Δ

Choruses in tragedy march on in anapestic dimeter, while in comedy the anapestic tetrameter is used for speakers in the *agōn* and the principal exposition in Aristophanes' *parabases*. The anapestic tetrameter catalectic seems to have been an elevated metre, suitable for arguments, grand statements, and declarations, and by the ancients was called the "aristophanean." Other comic poets employed a variety of 15-syllable metres for the *parabasis* proper. One of these, the eupolidean, was taken over by Aristophanes at *Clouds* 518–62, where he attacks other comic poets, including Eupolis, for the inferior nature of their comedy.

The **dactylic** or epic hexameter is the mainstay of all ancient epic:

– ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪ | – x

It occurs rarely in Greek drama. Based on the **dactyl** [– ∪ ∪], this meter allows a resolution only to a **spondee** [– –]. This is the meter of Homer, the *Homeric Hymns*, *The Voyage of Argo* (third century BC), and of oracular pronouncements, and must have possessed the aura of grandeur and epic heroism. This may well explain its rarity in drama. When it does occur in comedy, the context is usually a parody of Homer or of oracles or speeches by a god or hero; *Frogs* closes with four solemn lines in dactylic hexameters. An intriguing use of this meter in tragedy occurs at *Philoktetes* 839–42 when Neoptolemos rejects the chorus's advice to take the bow and flee – his argument is that "the god told us to take *him*." It is as if a god is speaking through Neoptolemos, this in a play which depends greatly on the proper interpretation of an oracle.

The meters of the choral odes, the *kommoi* between actor and chorus, and the monodies of the actor are complicated and beyond the scope of an introductory study. Some of the metrical schemes develop from what are called "lyric" versions of the above meters, others depend on a core unit of the **choriamb** [– ∪ ∪ –] with various embellishments before and after. In the choral odes and *kommoi*, pairs of units will correspond formally in their metrical scheme, to the point where we may suspect corruption in the ancient text where the meter does not correspond. One metrical unit, the **dochmiac** [∪ – – ∪ –], with the possibility of any long being resolved into two shorts, was especially associated with emotional intensity in tragedy, e.g. the entry of the terrified chorus of women at *Seven* 78–107, and when employed in comedy is very often used to create a tragic effect (as at *Birds* 1188–95/1262–8). We have mentioned earlier that the choral songs were written in a literary Doric dialect that would have already given a different feel to their performance.

Glossary of Names and Terms

Aeschylus career: 498–456, the first of the three great tragedians; seven plays have come down under his name.

Agathon a tragic poet of the 410s and 400s, best known for his appearances in Plato's *Symposium* and Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria*.

agōn a formally structured contest between two antagonists, found in both comedy and tragedy.

agora the market-place, where the daily life of Athens was conducted; it contained shops, stoas, municipal buildings, courts, temples.

Alexandria a city in Egypt in the Nile Delta, founded by Alexander the Great in 330; its university and library became the leading scholarly center of the ancient world.

anapest the metrical unit [$\cup \cup -$]; see the appendix on meter.

archon one of the nine senior officials at Athens, chosen by lot. The archon *eponymous* presided over the City Dionysia, the archon *basileus* over the Lenaia.

Aristophanes career: 427 – ca. 385, the best-known and only surviving exponent of Old Comedy; eleven of his comedies are extant.

Aristotle 384–322 BC, pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great; author of *Poetics*, an important source for Greek drama.

Attic pertaining to the region of Attica, of which Athens was the chief city; often used to denote the dialect of this region.

aulos a double recorder (often misnamed “flute”), played to accompany the dithyramb and the sung parts of drama.

chorēgos “chorus bringer,” a wealthy Athenian (or a metic at the Lenaia) who would sponsor the production of dithyramb, tragedy, or comedy.

City Dionysia the major Athenian festival honoring the god Dionysos, held in the month of Elaphebolion (late March).

dactyl the dactylic hexameter [– ◡ ◡] was the grand meter of heroic (epic) poetry; see appendix on meter.

dēmos “the people,” the sovereign political body at Athens; “democracy” is “rule of the people.”

didaskalia production records; also the title of a lost work by Aristotle.

didaskalos “teacher,” the technical term for the person who put on a play.

dithyramb a large-scale choral song; the first day of the Dionysia was devoted to competitions for men’s and boys’ choirs. Aristotle claims that tragedy came “from those who led the dithyramb.”

Dorian Greeks one of three major Greek ethnic groups, the Dorians in the classical period lived in the north-west of Greece, the Peloponnese (especially Sparta), the southern islands of the Aegean (Crete), and their colonies in the west. In Greek drama the choruses will sing their formal odes in an artificial and literary Doric dialect.

eisodos “way in,” one of two formal entrances on either side of the *orchēstra*.

ekklēsia the Athenian assembly, composed of citizen males over eighteen, located on the Pnyx, a hill to the west of the Acropolis.

ekkyklēma “wheel out,” a large wheeled platform that could be rolled out through the center doors of the *skēnē*-building to display interior scenes and dramatic tableaux.

episodes the scenes, usually in iambic trimeter, involving the actors (and the chorus).

Eupolis career: 429–411, one of the three canonical poets of Old Comedy, wrote fourteen or fifteen comedies; only fragments of his plays survive.

Euripides career: 455–407, the third of the three canonical tragic poets; nineteen plays have come down to us under his name.

exodos “way out,” the closing scene of a tragedy or comedy.

hetaira “female companion,” a courtesan or professional prostitute, a type character in later Greek comedy.

Homer the great epic poet of the eighth century, whose poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey* lie at the start of Western literature.

hypothesis an ancient summary of a Greek play, often containing both a plot-line and the details of the production.

iambic meter based on the form [◡ –]; see the appendix on meter.

kommos a formal song between an actor (actors) and chorus, usually one of lament.

kōmōidoumenoi real persons made fun of in comedy.

Kratinos career: 454–423, the earliest of the canonical three poets of Old Comedy, author of about twenty-five comedies; only fragments of his plays have survived.

Lenaia Athenian festival of Dionysia, held in the month of Gamelion (late January); from the late 440s dramatic competitions were part of this festival.

Lykourgos Athenian political leader responsible for rebuilding the theater in the 330s, and for establishing the official texts of Aeschylus, Sophokles, and Euripides.

maenads “mad women,” followers of the god Dionysos.

mēchanē “machine,” a crane-like device that allowed characters to appear in the air or to make an aerial entrance from behind the *skēnē*.

Menander career: ca. 320–290, the best-known and only surviving playwright of New Comedy.

metatheater the self-conscious reference within a theatrical work to theater or drama itself, bringing heightened awareness to the audience of the text as a work of theater and thereby breaking down the supposed “fourth wall” separating stage from audience.

metics in Greek *metoikoi*, foreigners permanently resident at Athens.

monody “song alone,” a lyric piece sung by an actor alone, lacking the formal structure of a choral song (*stasimon*).

ōdeion “singing place,” a covered auditorium for musical performances; the Odeion of Perikles was built next to the Theater of Dionysos in the 430s.

orchēstra “dancing place,” a round area at the foot of the slope on which the spectators sat; this was the focus of the dramatic spectacle.

Oxyrhynchos a city in the Nile Valley of Upper Egypt, most famous for the excavations in 1896 which yielded major papyrus finds, which are still being published as *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (*POxy.*). Discoveries relating to Greek drama include substantial amounts of Sophokles’ *Trackers* and Euripides’ *Hypsipyle*, Satyros’ third-century *Life of Euripides*, and the comedies of Menander.

parabasis (pl. *parabases*) a formally structured part of an Old Comedy, where the actors have left the playing-area and the chorus address the spectators, both in their own persona and as the poet himself.

paragraphos a brief underlining at the beginning of a verse in an ancient manuscript or papyrus, which indicates a change of speaker.

parodos “way on,” the entry-song of the chorus.

Peloponnesian War a series of conflicts between Athens and her allies and an alliance headed by Sparta; the principal conflict lasted from 431 to 404.

Perikles lived 494–429, the leading political figure of fifth-century Athens, in power almost continually from 461 to his death in 429, responsible for the advancement of Athenian power and prestige and for the building on the Acropolis.

Persian Wars three unsuccessful invasions of Greece by Persia in 492, 490, and 481–479.

phlyax-vases vases with humorous scenes from south Italy and painted during the fourth century. Originally thought to be depicting scenes from a local Italian farce (the *phlyakes*), these are now recognized as showing scenes from Athenian Old and Middle Comedy.

Phrynichos career: 500–470, an early writer of tragedy.

Plato lived 427–347 BC, Athenian philosopher and pupil of Sokrates; in his dialogues (principally *Republic* and *Laws*) he put tight strictures on the role of poets in his ideal city.

polis the ancient Greek term for “city-state.”

satyr-drama a shorter drama with a chorus of satyrs, the half-human and half-animal followers of Dionysos; it followed the three tragedies

scholion (pl. scholia) ancient commentaries to a classical text, transmitted along with the text itself.

skēnē “tent,” a formal structure behind the *orchēstra* with a large central door, windows, and a roof that could be used as a playing-area (*theologeion*).

Sophokles career: 468–406, the second of the three canonical poets of tragedy; seven plays have come down to us under his name.

stasimon “standing-song,” sung by the chorus while in position in the orchestra and separating the action in the episodes. The usual form is a series of metrically responsive *strophē* (“turns”) and *antistrophēs* (“counter-turns”), finished with an epode. Sometimes called a “choral ode.”

stichomythia the fast-paced and formal line-by-line response between two actors or between an actor and the chorus.

stratēgoi “generals,” the ten annually elected political and military leaders of Athens.

Suda an historical and literary encyclopaedia of the ancient world, compiled in the tenth century AD.

Syracuse located on the east coast of Sicily and one of the leading Greek states in the early fifth century, it possessed an impressive theater and its own tradition of drama.

theatron “theater,” both the larger complex as a whole and more narrowly the part where the spectators sat and watched.

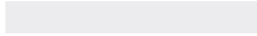
theologeion “god speak,” the roof of the *skēnē*-building, which could be used for the appearance of gods or for any aerially elevated scene.

Thespis the traditional first performer of tragedy in 534.

trochaics a meter of the form [– ∪]; see the appendix on meter.

tyrant (*tyrannos*) a man who had made himself ruler in a Greek city-state, as opposed to an hereditary monarch (*basileus*); the term did not in itself carry the modern overtones of “tyrant.”

Timeline



Military and External Events	Political and Social Events	History of Greek Drama
ca. 546 Cyrus of Persia conquers Lydia and Greek cities of Western Asia	546 Peisistratos becomes tyrant of Athens	ca. 600 Arion “invents” the dithyramb
	527 Death of Peisistratos; Hippias becomes tyrant	534 Traditional date for the first official performance of tragedy at Athens (Thespis)
525–520 Samos falls to the Persians		
512 Darius I of Persia invades Europe	510 Hippias expelled from Athens	
	507 Kleisthenes establishes democracy at Athens	
		ca. 501 Reorganization of the City Dionysia; first official satyr-drama
		499–496 Début of Aeschylus

Continued

Military and External Events	Political and Social Events	History of Greek Drama
499–494 Ionian Greeks revolt from Persian rule 494 Fall of Miletos to the Persians ends Ionian Revolt 490 Persian attack on Eretria and Athens; battle of Marathon	487 First ostracism and election of generals at Athens	490–470 Epicharmos produces comedy at Syracuse
481–479 Xerxes of Persia launches major invasion of Greece 480 Greek naval victory at Salamis. Syracusan victory over Carthage at Himera 479 Greek land victory at Plataia ends Persian threat	480 Occupation and sack of Athens by the Persians 477 Delian League established 472 Ostracism of Themistokles 463 Athenian alliance with Argos 461 Reform of the Areopagos; radical democracy established	486 First official performance of comedy at City Dionysia
461–446 First conflict between Athens and Sparta	454 Delian League becomes the Athenian Empire	468 Début of Sophokles
449 Peace of Kallias between Athens and Persia		before 458 <i>Skēnē</i>-building constructed in the Theater 456 Death of Aeschylus 455 Début of Euripides
		ca. 449 Introduction of actors' prizes at City Dionysia

Military and External Events	Political and Social Events	History of Greek Drama
	448 Major building program on the Acropolis begins (Parthenon)	
446 Thirty-year peace pact between Athens and Sparta		
	441–429 Perikles at the height of his power at Athens	
		ca. 440 Introduction of dramatic competitions at the Lenaia
441–439 Samian Revolt		
		ca. 432 Introduction of actors' prizes at Lenaia
431–404 Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta		
	429 Plague at Athens; death of Perikles	
427 Revolt of Mytilene from Athenian Empire		427 Début of Aristophanes
425 Athenian victory at Pylos		
	422 Death of Kleon in battle	
421 Peace of Nikias		
	416 Ostracism of Hyperbolos (last use of ostracism at Athens)	
415 Athens launches major expedition against Sicily	415 Scandals of the Herms and the Mysteries	
413 Athenian defeat in Sicily		
	411 Short-lived coup at Athens ("Revolution of 400")	
		407 Death of Euripides
406 Athenian naval victory at Arginousai		406 Death of Sophokles
405 Spartan victory at Aigos Potamoi		
404 Athenian surrender ends the Peloponnesian War		
	404/3 Thirty Tyrants in power at Athens	
	403 Restoration of the democracy at Athens	
	399 Death of Sokrates	

Continued

Military and External Events	Political and Social Events	History of Greek Drama
396–386 Hostilities between Greece and Persia		
	387 Plato founds the Academy in Athens	
386 “King’s Peace” between Persia and Greek cities		386 Performance of an “Old” tragedy added to the Dionysia ca. 385 Death of Aristophanes
371 Thebes defeats Sparta at Leuktra		
	367–347 Aristotle attends Plato’s Academy	
362 Thebes defeats Sparta at Mantinea		
359 Philip II becomes King of Macedon		
357–346 Hostilities between Philip II of Macedon and Athens	343–340 Aristotle tutors Alexander of Macedon	before 340 Reorganization of the festivals; performance of an “Old” comedy at the Dionysia.
338 Philip defeats the Greeks at Chaironeia		
336 Philip assassinated; Alexander becomes King of Macedon		
334–323 Alexander conquers the Persian Empire	334 Aristotle founds the Lyceum in Athens 331 Alexander founds the city of Alexandria in Egypt	ca. 330 Lykourgos builds the stone theater at Athens and establishes official texts of Aeschylus, Sophokles, and Euripides; Aristotle writes his <i>Poetics</i>
323 Death of Alexander and dissolution of his empire		

Military and External Events

323–321 Unsuccessful attempt by Athens to break free from Macedon (Lamian War)

301 Battle of Ipsos; last attempt to reunify the empire of Alexander

Political and Social Events

323–283 Reign of Ptolemy I (Egypt); foundation of the Library of Alexandria
317–307 Demetrius of Phaleron in power at Athens

History of Greek Drama

321 Début of Menander

290 Death of Menander
246–224 Ptolemy III acquires the texts of Aeschylus, Sophokles, and Euripides for the Library at Alexandria

Further Reading

The literature on a subject like Greek Drama is immense and can range from general introductions for the beginner to very specialized studies for the advanced student in the field. We have included below a selection of books and articles that will assist the student (or instructor) in broadening their knowledge of the subject.

Items marked * appear in the “Recommended Reading” sections of chapters 1–5.

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- We would direct students' attention also to three useful collections of secondary material:

- *L'Année Philologique (APh)*, now available as an online database [www.annee-philologique.com/aph] that can be searched by ancient authors (e.g. "Euripides"), modern authors (e.g. "Taplin"), or subject (e.g. "Drama").
- *Table of Contents On-Line (TOCSIN)*, an online database of the authors and titles of articles in journals and collections (since 1992, and in some cases earlier), that can be searched by word (e.g. "Medea") or author's name (e.g., "Taplin") [www.chass.utoronto.ca/amphoras/tocs.html].
- *Oxford Bibliography On-line (OBO)* – a subscription database with general bibliographies (annotated) of Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, Fragments of Old Comedy, Menander, and Sophokles [www.oxfordbibliographies.com].

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